

Being a Blessing like Barnabas

Acts 11:24-26

What is your story? Where do you want to go in life? Or what do you want to accomplish from this point in your life to the end? What do you want to be? What are the goals that you consider to be “glorious”—having great worth in and of themselves? Somewhere in the heart of every man and woman is the understanding of what one should do for his or her fellow human beings. Jesus reminded us of one of the greatest Old Testament commandments, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27). All of us would like to bless others; but how can we do this? In this mixed-up, crazy world, with all of our pitfalls and problems, how can we be a blessing to others? In today’s message, we will see how each of us can bless people in the same way that Barnabas did. The Scripture lays out his testimony like a pattern for each of us to follow. By following the pattern of Barnabas, you and I could be a blessing like Barnabas!

Blessing Others by Serving

[In the last message from Acts 11:19-23ⁱ](#) we learned about Joseph, nicknamed “Barnabas, the son of encouragement.” He boldly built his work on the foundation of faith in the Gospel. He used his God-given background to do so. Servant-leaders are like that. They recognize that God is at work in the upbringing and experiences of His servants to prepare them for specific assignments. Servant-leaders can also learn to live by what the Lord is teaching others. For instance, the previous section in Acts was taken up with a remarkable series of events. In order for the Apostle Peter to witness to Gentiles in Caesarea, it took a vision from God – repeated three times! (Acts 11:7-10). Peter went to Caesarea, albeit it hesitantly. And the Gentiles glorified God for the gospel! That news broke like an exciting fireworks display all over Jerusalem. God had granted the Gentiles repentance unto life! (Acts 11:18). So when Barnabas was asked to go to Antioch, the Bible records no dawdling hesitation. Barnabas understood how God was at work, and he was eager to be a part of it. And Acts 11:23 records about Barnabas:

“Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.”

G. Campbell Morgan noted that Barnabas “coming to Antioch found the evidences of grace, a new tone and disposition, evidences of joy, light, and happiness; all that which characterized the presence of the Spirit, and the grace of God.”ⁱⁱ We have observed the perceptive service of Barnabas, who “saw the grace of God.” We studied how to watch for the magnificent working of the grace of God, as he did. Each one of us who desires to be a godly leader embraces this lesson. We must always be ready to exercise God-given discernment in God’s great harvest field. And all this was done, in spite of the significant ethnic differences, in a profoundly pagan culture. Barnabas blessed others in that culture; we could bless people in our own culture by following his pattern.

Blessing Others by Beginning at the Source

Barnabas saw that God had granted “repentance unto life” to the Gentiles at Antioch. He learned that God had done the same gracious work in these saints that God had done in his own soul. And the blessings of salvation overflowed into the lives of others. Has God granted you “repentance

unto life?" This is not a mere religious experience or the praying of a prayer. Jesus began His ministry with the words, **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"** (Matthew 3:2). Has the Gospel of Jesus Christ – His death on the cross for your sins, His burial, and His glorious resurrection – seized your soul? Has that merciful work of God gripped your heart by grace? Has God granted you "repentance unto life?" When you speak of your becoming a Christian, was that a life-changing event? Have you seen clearly that His work has caused you to love the Lord more than your lusts? When Peter described this repentance, he preached to the Jewish people, **"unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities"** (Acts 3:26). Have you been blessed to turn away from your sins and transgressions? Ask the Lord to cause His light to shine in your heart. [To the glory of God](#), ask the Lord to grant you repentance unto eternal life. Barnabas built on his own background of belief in the Gospel, and you can too. Does the ministry of Barnabas intrigue you? Would you like to get in on that adventure in Antioch in your own day and time? By following the pattern of Barnabas, you and I could be a blessing like Barnabas!

Blessing Others by Speaking Up

When this "son of encouragement" saw the grace of God, he gladly spoke up. No one had to squeeze it out of him or pressure him to say something. With tenderness, and boldness, Barnabas spoke up with gladness. What a combination! What a blessing! Servant-leaders like Barnabas are thrilled by the gracious favor of God; they use their energies to help believers draw close to the Lord in a single-minded manner. If you and I wanted to follow the Barnabas pattern here, how might we go about it?

■ By having something to say

If you wanted to encourage someone right now, what would you say? What would give them courage? What could you say with gladness that reflected tenderness and boldness? As a believer you are commanded to do this daily ([Hebrews 3:13-14](#)). But you need to have something to say. How do you come up with "something to say?" This question highlights the importance of Biblical meditation ([Psalm 1](#), [Joshua 1:8](#)). Let's cut to the chase by asking it this way: "Are you getting one thought out of God's Word each and every day?" The Bible speaks of continually filling your heart with the Word of God. When you saturate your soul with the Scriptures, they begin to really speak to you ([Proverbs 6:22](#), [Colossians 3:16](#)). That is how you have "something to say" that will give courage to others. Life is too short to be shallow. But God's Word will give you depth. How? The Scriptures will humble you and help you. They will teach you to be meek and tender like the Lord ([Matthew 11:28-30](#)). But they will also give you boldness like you have never known before. If you would like to be like Barnabas, then start getting that one thought every day out of God's Word. Go deep and draw from the deep refreshing water of the Word. Then you can bless others like Barnabas, by exhorting others daily.

■ *With God's purpose in mind*

Jesus said that, **“No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God”** ([Luke 9:62](#)). Undoubtedly, Barnabas had this in mind when he encouraged them that **“with purpose of heart they would cleave [hold on to] unto the Lord.”**

Imagine what would happen if every believer in our church were willing to encourage each other with God’s Word. What if each one of us were to get that one new thought each day from God’s Word? And what if we were to share it with the purpose of helping others hold fast to the Lord? The Apostle Paul taught us what would happen in our church. Please turn over to 1 Corinthians 14 to see it. The sign gift of spontaneously speaking in other languages was an ability given during the apostolic age. That ability was for a sign to unbelieving people ([1 Corinthians 14:22](#)). But speaking to those in the congregation in a language they could understand could have a powerful impact on the church. Paul called this “prophesying” ([1 Corinthians 14:24](#)) – sharing with others what God is showing you. (This use of the word “prophesy” is referring to “telling forth the truth.” The other use of “prophesy” is about prophecy, in the sense of telling the future.) Vine defines Paul’s use of “prophesy” in 1 Corinthians 14 as “the speaking forth of the mind and counsel of God.”ⁱⁱⁱ When you saturate your soul with the Scripture, you learn much about the mind and counsel of God. About this text, Gordon Fee commented, “The nature of this argumentation seems to exclude the option that this gift was limited to a group of authoritative people who were known in the community as ‘the prophets’.”^{iv} Paul did not write, “If all have the gift of prophecy” or “if all the prophets prophesy,” he wrote “if all prophesy.” In other words, if all the members of the congregation shared something from God’s Word in common language understood by all, what would happen?

Now read 1 Corinthians 14:24-25 – **“But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or *one* unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on *his* face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.”**

Now please let this sink in. If all prophesy, he (an unbeliever) is convicted (through the Spirit of God) by all; he recognizes his accountability, because the message comes from all the believers in the congregation.

What if every one of the believers present here would concentrate – learning to meditate on God’s Word daily? Paul explained that when believers get serious about using the Word of the Spirit, they can expect to see a manifest work of the Spirit. One commentator wrote, “The triple use of *all* in the Greek (v.24) emphasizes that all of the church through its prophetic message has, in God’s providence, a part in bringing the unbeliever to this place of conviction. For the unbeliever in the church service will recognize that God really is present and dealing with him.”^v Many of you are very burdened about the perverse movements in our culture at this present hour. But “culture” is the collective result of individual choices. In verse 25, the emphasis is on the individual (“his heart”). This is the Spirit’s convicting work in the heart of a sinner. Let’s concentrate on being part of God’s great work of conversion, which will accomplish far more than any war against any culture. In the ancient treatise “The Art of War,” Sun Tzu emphasized the importance of using military deception. It’s important for us all to remember that we are in a spiritual warfare against the great deceiver, Satan. Instead of being distracted by all the recent feints and ploys, let’s emphasize the great need

to **“be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might”** (Ephesians 6:10). Let’s use the Word of God to its full effect. When Barnabas observed the Antiochan church, he saw God’s grace at work. So “the son of encouragement” encouraged them to press on.

But how did he do this? How did his encouraging ministry overflow into the lives of other? If we want to be a blessing like Barnabas, we must understand this part of his pattern.

In Acts 11:24, Dr. Luke gave us three insights into the nature of Barnabas:

Blessing Others by Being Spirit-filled

A Good Man

“For he was a good man . . .”

How can a sinful human being ever be “a good man?” Only by the grace of God. To Barnabas, God had “granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18). Washed from sin in the blood of the Lamb, Barnabas had a new standing in God’s sight. Jesus was “delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification” (Romans 4:25). Through that finished work of the Lord Jesus, God is both “just and the justifier of him who believes in Jesus” (Romans 3:26). Like Joseph of Arimathea (Luke 23:50), Barnabas was a good man.

A Spirit-Filled Man

“ . . . and full of the Holy Spirit . . .”

The same Holy Spirit who conceived Jesus in Mary’s womb raised Him again from borrowed tomb. Jesus was anointed by the Spirit at His baptism and led by the Spirit into the wilderness. Jesus cast out demons by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:28). He breathed upon His disciples with the words, “Receive ye the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). Sinclair Ferguson wrote, “As the great Cappadocian Father, Basil of Caesarea (c. 330-379), put it, the Holy Spirit was Christ’s ‘inseparable companion . . . all the activity of Christ was unfolded in the presence of the Holy Spirit . . .’ That is why His witness is so important, potent and reliable. From womb to tomb to throne, the Spirit was the constant companion of the Son. As a result, when he comes to Christians to indwell them, He comes as the Spirit of *Christ* in such a way that to possess Him is to possess Christ Himself, just as to lack Him is to lack Christ. . . This aspect of the Spirit’s ministry has suffered considerable neglect in the history of theology, despite noteworthy exceptions. Abraham Kuyper was right when he wrote that ‘the Church has never sufficiently confessed the influence the Holy Spirit exerted upon the work of Christ.’”^{vi} Ferguson’s point is that to see Christ in all His fullness is to see the perfect, Spirit-filled man. Barnabas was filled with the Spirit, just like Jesus. You and I can be a blessing to others by following this pattern. Ephesians 5:18 commands us to be filled with the Spirit. 1 Thessalonians 5:19 commands us not to quench the Spirit; one way that we quench the Spirit is by despising the preaching of the Spirit’s Word (1 Thessalonians 5:20). God commands us not to grieve the Spirit by bitter, angry, evil speaking (Ephesians 4:30). The servant-leader understands that he must be filled with the Spirit of God in order to be used in the work of God. He knows that his life will bear fruit as he abides in the Lord and allows the Spirit of God to work through him.

One of the ways of thinking about being filled with the Spirit is like *“a ship’s sail filled out by the wind.”*^{vii} In the days of sailing vessels, sailors dreaded “the doldrums.”^{viii} This is an area about five degrees north and south of the equator where the warm, moist air rises quickly into the atmosphere. As a result, there is little surface wind – which could be deadly for a sailing ship. The

same is true in the horse latitudes, which are about 30 degrees north and south of the equator. For a sailing ship at sea, to be becalmed in the doldrums meant little to no forward motion. It meant hours and days of misery without much real progress. Could it be that this is the present state of the American church? Might it not be that our miserable doldrums are showing us that we need the Spirit? We could be “like a ship’s sail filled out by the wind.” If you want to be a blessing like Barnabas, you must be filled with God’s spirit.

A Faith-filled Man

“ . . . and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.”

This man was not full of fears or full of fury. He was full of faith. This was the key to his maturity and stability. About faith, Hebrews 11:6 comments, **“But without faith *it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*”** Barnabas, a man who was full of faith, believed the God of the Bible; he believed God would diligently reward those who seek Him. So he encouraged them all with purpose of heart to hold fast to the Lord.

Blessing Others by Being Selfless

Verse 25 may be one of the most counterintuitive verses in Scripture. **“Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch.”** At first glance, it doesn’t seem as if Barnabas used common sense. But his sensitivity to God’s Spirit accomplished far more than common sense ever will. When things seemed to be at their height, Barnabas refused to bask in the limelight. Instead, he wanted to help the believers at Antioch go deeper into God’s Word. To do this, Barnabas thought in terms of synergy rather than just more personal energy. Today this is often expressed as “working smarter rather than just merely working harder.” Synergy involves the combination of efforts from several sources. He believed that Saul’s gifts could be used at Antioch, so he went to find him. Actually the word translated “seek” (anazateo) means “to try to locate by search, look, search for someone.”^x In other words, Barnabas had to track Saul down in Tarsus. When he found him, the verse tells us that he “brought him unto Antioch.” “Brought” translates a Greek word (ago) meaning “to direct the movement of an object from one position to another.”^x It sounds as if “the son of encouragement” had to strongly encourage Saul to embark on that trip. He believed that Saul was essential because he had so effectively evangelized the Gentiles. If you want to be a blessing like Barnabas, then observe his pattern of ministry. The servant-leader does not insist on remaining as the center of attention, but instead searches for others to use their spiritual gifts in the work of the ministry. Stewart Custer commented, “There are some men who would never think of anyone in such a situation. All others would be regarded as potential rivals. Barnabas was not cut out of that cloth. He knew in his heart that Saul was the man for that outreach. What a blessing to encounter a man under the control of the Spirit of God”^{xi}

Blessing Others by Using the Scriptures

“And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.”

The synergy – the combination of the energies of Barnabas and Saul – made a profound impact. When you learn that for “a whole year they assembled themselves with the church” you see what

they did. They were not content with one or two hours on a Sunday morning. The text clearly implies that they met, not just one hundred hours, but for hundreds of hours in a year. They used the opportune moments, whether they were early in the morning, late in the afternoon or the evening. They used their discretionary time to dig into doctrinal teaching. They read and re-read the Old Testament. They studied the Gospels about Jesus Christ – the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises ([2 Corinthians 1:20](#)). And they learned to preach Christ in that pagan culture. Perhaps the Apostle Paul was thinking of this very episode when he wrote to the Colossian church (Colossians 1:27-29):

“²⁷ To whom God would make known what *is* the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: ²⁸ Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: ²⁹ Whereunto I also labor, striving according to his working, which works in me mightily.”

Dear friends, we do not need less of the Word of God and more of the world. We will not become like the church at Antioch by setting aside good preaching and hoping for good politics. We can never nourish our souls on psychology, avoiding the rich feast of Scripture. We need more exhortations, not more entertainment. In short, in this day and time, we do not need less of the Bible, but more. This is how we can be a blessing like Barnabas. Barnabas shows each of us how to lead. The servant-leader makes his choices carefully recognizing that God may be pleased to use his ministry to make an enormous impact. And the impact was historic: “the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch!”

By following the pattern of Barnabas, you and I could be a blessing like Barnabas. Let’s enlist in this great adventure to see what God has in mind for our entire congregation.

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ⁱ Building People Like Barnabas, accessed at <https://www.cbcbfindlay.org/building-people-like-barnabas/>

ⁱⁱ G. Campbell Morgan, *The Acts of the Apostles*, New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1924. P.286

ⁱⁱⁱ W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr., [Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words](#) (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson, 1996), 492.

^{iv} Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1987, p.685

^v W. Harold Mare, *1 Corinthians*, Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976, p. 274.

^{vi} Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, Downer’s Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1996, p.37

^{vii} William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, et al., [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 828.

^{viii} See “What are the Doldrums?” National Ocean service NOAA accessed at <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/doldrums.html> and “What are the Horse Latitudes” accessed at <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/horse-latitudes.html>

^{ix} William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, et al., [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 62.

^x Arndt and Danker, p. 16

^{xi} Stewart Custer, *Witness to Christ, a Commentary on Acts*, Greenville: BJU press, 2000, p. 161-162