

## BARNABAS - "The Powerful Ministry Of Encouragement"



1. **(Q1)** There is an undefined gap of time between verse 31 and verse 32. We must not read this as one event quickly following another.
2. **(Q1)** This must be understood as wealthy believers liquidating their excesses to supply what other believers lacked. This is *not* a sanctified form of communism, and certainly the poor in their midst (i.e. "any who had need") were *not* liquidating anything. This is consistent with the teaching of John the Baptizer, Jesus and Paul:

*"He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham." "And the crowds asked him, "What then shall we do?" And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise." Luke 3:7, 8, 10, 11*

*"And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" Mark 10:17, 21-23*

*"For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack." 2 Corinthians 8:12-15*

This theology of wealth was one of the foundational aspects of the core theology held by the early church. When Paul was officially recognized by the Jewish church in Jerusalem as an "apostle to the Gentiles," the only thing they told him that was a non-negotiable part of his whole message was "to remember the poor" (Gal 2:1-10).

It is also important to realize that the inclusive language of 4:32 (i.e. "the full number" and "no one said") is not a *quantitative* statement, but a *qualitative* one. Luke is painting a portrait here of the amazing unity and heart of these early believers, not giving a summary of a list of names. Ananias and Saphira were *certainly* in this fellowship, and *outside* the "full number" Luke mentioned.

3. **(Q2)** Luke leaves little room for doubt by telling us: (1) *who* surnamed Joseph (it *wasn't* his family), and (2) what his new name meant. Luke wanted his readers/listeners to know that this man was one who encouraged."
4. **(Q2)** The word family to which "encouragement" belongs is a rich group of Greek words. It includes, among others, the descriptor applied to the Holy Spirit by Jesus in John 14:16 — *"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever..."* It is also used for the *ministry* of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers in Acts 9:31 — *"So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the **comfort** of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied."* It was used for the ministry of Paul (Acts 13:15) and the ministry of New Testament prophets in general (1 Cor 14:3). The writer of the letter to the Hebrews

includes it as the reasonable and necessary ministry of believers *to one another* (Heb 10:24-25). Finally, it is used of Jesus' present intercessory ministry on our behalf (1 John 2:1).

The root is the verb, *parakaleō* which can mean "to call alongside." The actual *purpose* of this "calling alongside" varies in Greek literature from providing legal defense, to character defense, to instilling courage prior to battle. However, the common denominator in all of these uses is "*keeping someone on their feet, when, if left to themselves, they would fall.*" This was Barnabas!

So, in addition to all the qualities he shared with the "full number" Luke described, this one quality set him apart from the rest, and hence the "nickname."

5. **(Q4-9:27)** A very, very vital piece of information that is "buried in the bushes" of this passage is that it was *Barnabas* who (obviously) searched for Saul, Barnabas who listened to Saul's whole story (and believed it!), Barnabas who risked everything in terms of his own reputation, his life, and the lives of the Jerusalemite church, by bringing Saul to the group. And, it was Barnabas, *not* Saul, who shared Saul's conversion story with the church. In the end, it was Barnabas who gave credibility to Saul by virtue of his own reputation.
6. **(Q4-11:22-26)** The word translated "exhorted" (ESV), "encouraged" (NAS) is our verb *parakaleō* from Question 2 above.
7. **(Q4-Acts 13)** It is very interesting that the previous verse says those who had heard Paul preach in the synagogue were "begging" for them to return the following sabbath and continue where they had left off. The word "beg" is from the same word family as Question 2, *parakaleō*. It means to "call to one's aid." This is a much stronger statement than mere interest. There is at least the idea that these men recognized a need in their lives and were asking Paul and Barnabas to meet it.
8. **(Q7-a)** "the idle" — In Thessalonica, some believers had actually quit working because they were convinced of the imminent return of Jesus. Unfortunately, their choice had created a burden for the other believers who were faced with the question of whether or not to provide them with food, etc. Paul's admonition here is basically that they need to get back to work. They have the resources to meet their own needs, so they should use them. The modern application here would be a situation where one believer's "convictions" results in other believers having to pick up the slack. Paul's instructions here indicate that the "idle" believer should be confronted and told to use his own resources to meet his own needs, rather than assuming that *others* will be responsible for helping him live out his personal convictions.
9. **(Q8-Prov 18:24)** To a certain degree, my effectiveness in personal ministry is *inversely proportional* to the number of relationships I am trying to maintain.



## "Stumbling Stones"

1. **(Q1)** We must remember that whatever was true of "the full number of those who believed" (v. 32), was also true of Barnabas. It would be easy to miss this by jumping directly to the part of the passage that deals exclusively with him. The statements about Barnabas must be added to the list of qualities that described the believers in general.
2. **(Q4-11:22-26)** It would be a mistake to superimpose our *current* definition for "Christian" onto this passage. In the first century, especially in Antioch, the word "Christian" was a term of derision and scorn, not honor.
3. **(Q1-Mt 26:59)** Don't miss the larger fact that this short verse tells us that the vast majority of Jesus' entire political and spiritual *government* was opposed to him and wanted him dead.

4. **(Q4-Acts 15)** The people who benefited from Paul and Barnabas' "reports" were believers, *but* they were Gentiles (e.g. Phoenecia) and Samaritans, *not* Jewish Christians! It is interesting that while on their way to Jerusalem to confer with the *Jewish* church regarding the question of what to do with Gentile converts, Paul and Barnabas minister to that very group!
5. **(Q7-b)** "Encouragement" in the Bible is *not* a soft shoulder or a listening ear. That is our modern, pop-psychological influence on our vocabulary. "Encourage" used to mean "to put *courage* into." Even the word, "comfort" used to mean "to fortify" or "to strengthen." These words do not carry any notion of changing one's circumstances or even of helping them "feel better." They mean to empower someone to face what's in their life and to keep standing (cf. 1 Cor 10:13).
6. **(Q8)** Don't miss the fact that there are *two points* to this question: (1) the "nature" of encouragement; i.e., "what it is in itself," and (2) the "importance" of encouragement; "why is it so necessary, and what happens when it's missing?"



## “Going Deeper”

1. **(Q5)** (Have group members share their responses to *both* halves of this question.) "What do you think was behind Barnabas' willingness to risk his own reputation in believing and promoting Saul's story? What would cause someone to take this kind of risk?"
2. **(Q7-d)** "Why would you need 'patience' in dealing with each of these three types of Christians?"
3. **(Q8)** Have group members share their responses. Be especially alert for what they understand to be the *nature* of encouragement. It is vital for them (and you!) to see "encouragement" occurring in the midst of difficulty, not making people "feel better" or seeking to immediately deliver them from the difficulty.
4. **(Q8-Prov 18:24)** "What does this verse have to say about social networking (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.)?"