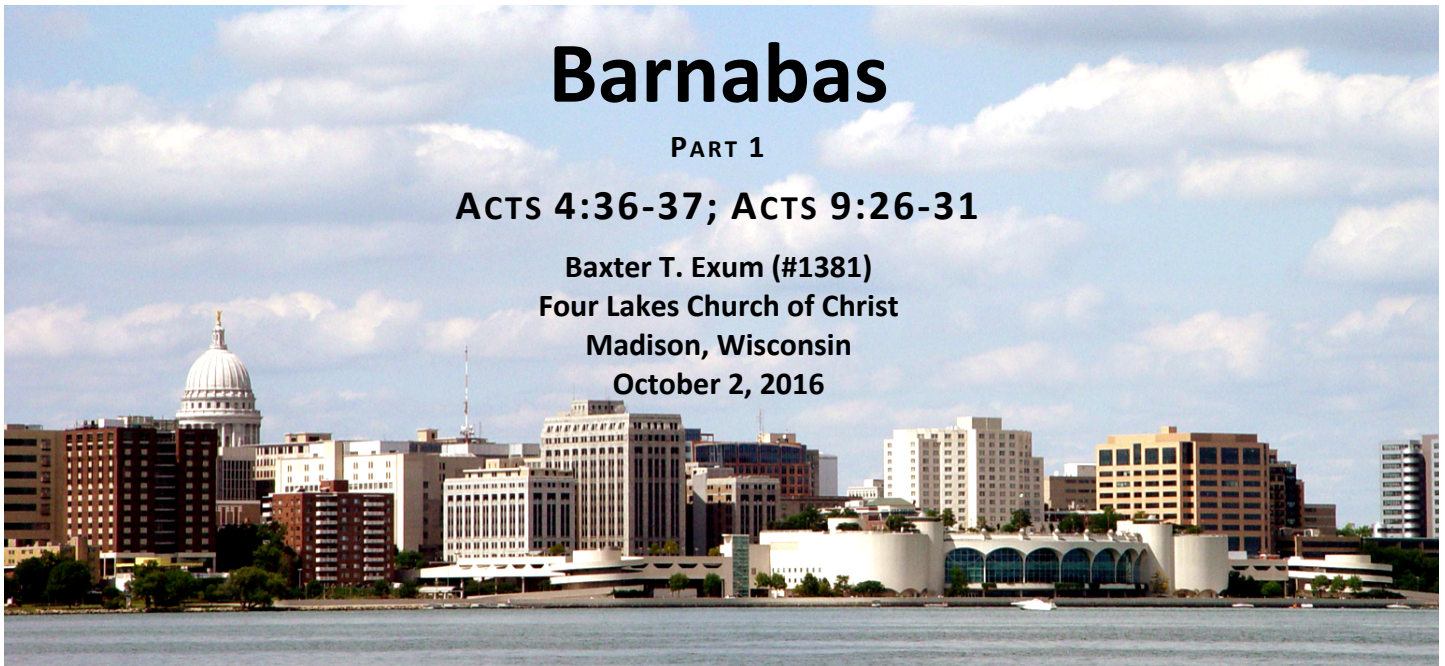


# Barnabas

PART 1

**ACTS 4:36-37; ACTS 9:26-31**

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This morning I'd like for us to study a request that came in from one of the teenagers a while back, and it is one of the most encouraging questions that I have ever received. I am so thankful, first of all, that the teens actually feel comfortable turning in ideas for lessons. But I am especially thankful for this question in particular. One of our teens has asked for a lesson on "ways that all people in the church (young, old, men, and women) can and should get involved." I think you will agree with me that this is quite an encouraging request!

From time to time, we hear in the news that kids these days are "bored," that there is nothing to do. And so politicians and community leaders will often go looking to provide opportunities – we need to build a skate park over here, we need a community center over here, we need to build this and build that – and many of these projects are indeed needed, especially in a community like ours where many children either do not have parents or have parents who are simply too busy to actually parent. But I say these things because it seems that kids looking for something to do or saying that they are "bored," has been a concern that goes back almost to the beginning!

And yet, as I was growing up, I am pretty sure that I was actually scared to tell either one of my parents that I was bored! And this was in the days before Netflix and Pokemon Go. But back in the olden days, we learned very quickly to never be bored, and if you were bored, never to admit it, because to admit any level of boredom was the same as asking for some chore! So I'm not saying that we were never bored growing up, but I am suggesting that in our family, at least, we learned to never admit it! And perhaps this is the way it was in your family as well. There was a garden to be weeded, firewood to be stacked, bathrooms to clean, snow to shovel, a lawn to mow, and on and on and on.

I am thankful, then, that one of the teens in the congregation here is asking this particular question – not complaining about being bored, but in a very positive way – looking for ways that all of us can get involved, or if I could paraphrase: What can we do? What can or should we be doing? That is a great question, and the question itself is encouraging.

This morning, then, as we try to give a practical and Biblical answer to this question, I'd like to do so by looking at a character from the New Testament who was actually known for the encouragement he provided. His

name is Joseph. However, very few of us know him by that name, and the reason is: This man had a nickname. In high school, some of you might not know that I had a nickname: Dos Equis! Dos Equis, of course, is Spanish for “two x’s,” and I got that nickname because of the two x’s in my name. Of course, Dos Equis is the name of a beer from Mexico (I’ve never had any, by the way), but that was my nickname. Well, Joseph also had a nickname. The nickname is Barnabas, or literally, “Son of Encouragement.” When the Jewish people wanted to say that somebody was really good at something, they would give them the nickname, “son of” whatever that person was really good at. And the idea is: Just as a son takes after his father, so also this person is like this particular quality. And so when Joseph is described as the “Son of Encouragement” (or Barnabas), they were saying that Barnabas was a very encouraging person.

As far as I can tell, that name (Barnabas) is mentioned 28 times in the New Testament, and almost every single time, Barnabas is doing something! And the value of studying Barnabas is that Barnabas seems like a rather “normal” Bible character. And what I mean by that is: We look at Barnabas, and it is rather easy to put ourselves in his place. And that’s the value of studying people; that’s why God told us about so many people in the Bible. People like us can be encouraging, and the idea is: If this guy can do it, then perhaps I can do it as well. And that is what we find with Barnabas.

This morning, then, I’d like for us to check in on two scenes in this man’s life, next Sunday we will look at several more scenes from this man’s life, and we’ll be looking at Barnabas with this question from one of our teens in mind: What can we actually do? And I’d like for us to learn a number of lessons from Barnabas as we outline some broad categories where all of us can get involved.

**I. As we look at the book of Acts, the first reference to Barnabas comes in Acts 4:36-37 where Barnabas did something to ENCOURAGE THOSE IN NEED.**

If you will, please turn with me to Acts 4, and I would invite you to keep your Bibles open with me in the book of Acts this morning – but we start in Acts 4. As the church has just been established, we have people from all over the world who had come together to celebrate Pentecost who are now staying for much longer than they expected, so they can learn more about Jesus from the apostles. Well, the longer they stay, the more they need, and that brings us to Acts 4:36-37, ***“Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”*** What I’d like to emphasize here is that Barnabas saw a need, and then he did something about it! He did something that was in his power to do. Since the Levites were not really given any land as an inheritance (since they were the priests and had to spread out among the various tribes), some have suggested that Barnabas was selling his burial plot here. We may never know until we meet Barnabas face-to-face, but what we know is that Barnabas had some kind of land, he sold it, and he brought the proceeds of that sale to the apostles to be shared with those in need. And I say that because of the two verses right before this. In verses 34-35, we find that there were no needy disciples, because everybody would share, even to the point where they sold land and houses. And we find in verse 36 that Barnabas is given here as an example.

I would just emphasize, then, that Barnabas seems to have set the example. He didn’t just wait around until somebody else took care of the problem, he didn’t wait until it was convenient, but he seems to have taken the lead here. He saw a need, and then he did something to take care of it. He did something that was within his power to do.

Last night, I put a link on the church's Facebook page, a link to some material by Kid President. Some of you know that Kid President is actually Roby Novak from Henderson, Tennessee. He is 12 years old and suffers from osteogenesis imperfecta, a genetic condition where his bones are incredibly fragile. He has already endured at least 70 broken bones. A number of years ago, he (with the coaching and video help of Brad Montague, his older brother-in-law) started creating a series of videos. Those videos have been a huge hit, and they went on to do many more videos that have gone viral many times over. Several years ago, he actually got invited to the White House and got to meet President Obama in the Oval Office.

What I put on our Facebook page, though, is a link to something known as "Socktober," his encouragement for everybody to do something to help alleviate the pain of homelessness. And the idea is: You start with your own friends and neighbors, you collect socks for the homeless, and then you deliver those socks to a local shelter. Years ago, we had a homeless man stop by the church in Janesville, and I vividly remember the man's feet. The socks that he had were literally fused to his feet. He had been wearing that pair of socks so long, and his feet were in such tough shape from walking everywhere in all kinds of weather (and probably also because of untreated diabetes), that his socks had become one with his feet. The man needed some socks. So, we got him some socks. It was such a small gesture, but it was desperately needed. And that is the idea of Socktober – do something. Last year, more than 10,000 individuals, churches, and businesses, from all 50 states and all seven continents got together and provided literally millions of socks for the homeless. Kid President even took this on an episode of Sesame Street. But this all started four years ago because this kid wanted to do something to help. Roby has the spirit of Barnabas!

What can we do? We can do something! We can jump in with him on this. All it takes is one person to say, "Hey, let's get some socks together!" But, like Barnabas, somebody needs to jump in and get it started. Or, we can do something original and very specific. The Golden Rule is that we will treat others the way we would like to be treated. There are so many possibilities. Be Jesus to the world around us. Be Jesus to somebody today! So with that as a goal, what needs to we see around us? Who is in need? We have bulletin full of names of some people going through some very serious health and emotional issues. How can we help? If my name were on that list, what would I appreciate having done for me? If I were stuck at home due to illness, what might I appreciate? And this question goes for all of us, but especially to our teens, since it was one of them who asked the question. What can YOU do to encourage people like Barnabas did? Barnabas sold some land and gave the money to the apostles. What can you do? Do you have any creative skills? Could those skills be put to use encouraging someone going through a rough time in their lives right now? I know one or two of our teens who can do some serious baking – I mean, make-your-dad-fat kind of baking! Some of you have taken baking to an entirely amazing level. Can that skill be used to encourage? Absolutely! Or maybe your skills are in another direction – helping one of our seniors set up an email account or a Facebook page so they can connect with their grandchildren. Or maybe you can write a card or send a note. Or maybe you have an allowance or have a job – like Barnabas, you also have the ability to encourage those in need. Right now, we are collecting snacks for Kennedy Elementary School right here in this neighborhood. Brandy and Ann have a list of items on the bulletin board. On your way out this morning, use your phone to take a picture of that list, and get something with your own money. We're about to start collecting afterschool snacks for Shults-Lewis. These are for kids like you who either have severe behavior or emotional issues, or their parents are no longer in the picture (in jail, or whatever). You can purchase items for those children. One of our members is collecting aluminum cans to help offset some expenses. Do you have any aluminum cans at home? You can bag those up and bring them here. And if you're currently just throwing your cans in the city bin, stop that! You can make it your mission to collect those cans and bring those here, instead. This week, my dad went on two visits to two of our local hospitals – he went to see two people with some rather loose ties to this congregation, and both of these people were in rather rough shape. Wouldn't it be nice when he goes back to

be able to bring some handwritten cards from the kids here? We have passed out blank cards today. Fill one out, and give those to my dad on your way out today, and he will make sure those are delivered. Things like this can be done in Bible class or on our own.

Helping those in need is good for those who receive the help or encouragement, but it is also good for us. When I was a teenager, I remember we got a call at church for somebody who was in desperate need of food, and the elders sent one of the men the church out to take care of it. And on his way out the door, this guy asked if I wanted to tag along. I agreed, and we went to one of the scariest motels I've ever seen – holes in the walls, insulation falling out, total filth. But we showed up to this hotel room with a box of food, and I got to see firsthand exactly how some of my own weekly contribution was used, and it was a motivator to give even more.

The main idea here at the beginning, though, is: Like Barnabas, all of us can do something to reach out and encourage those in need.

II. **There is a second aspect of Barnabas' life we can imitate, and that is, Barnabas also took a risk to step out and ENCOURAGE THE OUTCAST, to ENCOURAGE SOMEONE ON THE OUTSIDE TO BE INCLUDED BY THOSE ON THE INSIDE – HE INCLUDED THE EXCLUDED.**

I am referring, of course, to what Barnabas did for Saul, who went on to be known as Paul, and the account is found in Act 9. In Acts 9, Saul is blinded when he sees Jesus on the road to Damascus. He is on his way to Damascus, of course, to persecute the church. Later in life, Paul would explain that he had previously been a **“violent aggressor.”** He terrorized the early church. He would travel to some far off place to drag Christians out of their homes, bringing them back to Jerusalem to be punished for leaving the Jewish faith. Well, in Acts 9, Paul was on his way to Damascus, **“breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord”** (in Acts 9:1), but along the way, he sees Jesus in a vision, he is blinded by the light, he goes without food as he prays for three days, and at the end of those three days he is told to be immersed in water so that his sins can be washed away. He is baptized in Damascus, he starts preaching that Jesus is the Son of God, but the people are obviously hesitant. Notice, in verse 21, how the people were saying, **“Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?”** So, they were scared. They thought this might be some kind of a trick – accept this guy, he learns who all of you are, and then he turns you all in for being Christians. But he kept on preaching, even to the point where the Jews plotted to take his life. With the help of the church, he snuck out of Damascus at night, being let down in a basket through a hole in the city wall. And then he heads back to Jerusalem, and that is where we pick up with Acts 9:26-31,

*<sup>26</sup> When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. <sup>27</sup> But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. <sup>28</sup> And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord. <sup>29</sup> And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews; but they were attempting to put him to death. <sup>30</sup> But when the brethren learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus. <sup>31</sup> So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.*

In verse 26, Saul ***“was trying to associate with the disciples,”*** (and the idea is: over and over again); but, they were having nothing of it. The author of this passage tells us that they were all afraid of him. They thought it was some kind of a trap. The passage turns, though, in verse 27, as the text says, ***“But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles....”*** Saul (on the outside), wanted and needed to be on the inside, but the people on the inside had thrown up the barrier, “No, we are okay without you. Please, go away.” [PARAPHRASED]. Barnabas, though, sees what is happening here, and Barnabas steps up and takes hold of Saul. I take this literally. He TAKES Saul to the elders of the church, and he explains to the elders what has happened here. And by doing this, Barnabas takes a huge risk. Barnabas puts his own reputation on the line. Earlier, I didn’t tell you this, but when I said that Barnabas was known as the ***“Son of Encouragement,”*** the word translated as ***“encouragement”*** there is a word describing what happens when we call somebody to our side, when we stand next to somebody and put our arm around them. And that seems to be (quite literally) what happens here. It seems to me that Barnabas put his arm around Paul, stood in front of the elders of the church in Jerusalem, and basically said, “This man is okay!” And that right there made all the difference in the world!

I’ve put an article in the cubbyholes this morning, an article from the *New York Times* about what happened when Pee Wee Reese put his arm around Jackie Robinson back in the late 1940’s. We don’t have time to explain the entire background behind what happened there, but there was some serious heckling going on, and looking back on it, Mr. Robinson said this, *“Pee Wee kind of sensed the sort of hopeless, dead feeling in me and came over and stood beside me for a while. He didn’t say a word, but he looked over at the chaps who were yelling at me...and just stared. He was standing by me, I could tell you that. The hecklers ceased their attack. I will never forget it.”* Sometimes, we need somebody to stand beside us. That is what Barnabas did for Saul, and that is what we can do for others as we do whatever we can to help those on the outside be accepted.

Some time ago, I read about a young man who had come from a fairly wild background. He had obeyed the gospel, and several weeks after he was baptized, one of the members of the congregation called him one Friday night and said, “Hey, I was just wondering how you’re doing these days.” And the young Christian responded and said, “Well, I am just sitting here all by myself realizing that I can’t have any women and I can’t go out with my old drinking buddies. I was just sitting here all by myself thinking about the joy of Christian living!” You see, that man needed some encouragement. Like Saul, he was a Christian, but he needed help transitioning from the outside to the inside. He needed help getting plugged in.

So, I would suggest this as a second major category of ways all of us can actually do something in the church – First of all, like Barnabas, there are a number of things we can do to encourage those in need. But secondly, all of us can actually do something to include those who may not be included, we can do something to bring those who are on the outside to the inside. What does that look like? Well, it might involve a call, an email, a text, a Facebook message, a note, or even making plans to meet someone for lunch after worship. In the book of Hebrews, the author tells us to ***“...consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near”*** (Hebrews 10:24-25). So, even when we are here at worship, I would encourage all of us to take the first few minutes right after the closing prayer to pay special attention to those we don’t know. Do we see somebody who needs to be included? Do we see somebody who might need an arm around the shoulder? And if we do, then let us do it!

And I would mention one other category of people who might feel at least a little bit on the outside right now: What about our college students who are living away from home? We have two members right now who are

hundreds of miles away in college. Do you think they might be feeling ever so slightly on the outside right now? The question is: What can we do to encourage these two people? I cannot put my arm around their shoulders from 5 or 600 miles away, but certainly there is something we can actually DO. Those of you who have been away at college in the past, did you ever get a care package from this congregation? And if so, did that help in some way? And if it did, perhaps you can do the same thing for those who are away at college now – not just contribute toward it, but make it happen, coordinate it. As Christians, especially as new Christians, and especially when we feel “on the outside” for whatever reason, we need the support and encouragement of our Christian family. And there are so many ways to make this happen. Let us be creative, and let us be thinking about the Golden Rule.

**Conclusion:**

Hopefully we will be able to get back to Barnabas and this good question next week. This week, we’ve learned that (like Barnabas) we can encourage those in need, and we can encourage those who may be excluded for some reason. Next week we hope to look at three more scenes from this man’s life and some very practical things he did.

As we close, we want to invite everyone here to respond publicly to the word of God if you need to. Maybe you are already a Christian but need the prayers of the church, the encouragement of the church, or maybe even the forgiveness of the church. If you have something we need to pray about, I would encourage you to write it down if you can and bring it to me right after the lesson. There is also a chance that someone here this morning has not yet obeyed the gospel, but you know you are ready. The gospel is the good news that Jesus came to this earth to live a perfect life, he died on the cross, he was buried, and he was raised up on the third day. We respond to what he did by repenting of sin, making a choice to turn away from sin, and by allowing ourselves to be buried with Jesus in baptism. If we can help you do this, we hope you will let us know as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

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