

One of the keys to Barney's success on the kids program Barney and Friends is that he has a friendly, optimistic attitude. Barney is basically an encourager.

William Arthur Ward said, 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. With that thought in mind, I have entitled today's message;

Is your nickname Barney??

I want to look at another encourager today because I want to see if we are acting a lot like him. Acts 4:36 introduces him to us *And Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means, Son of Encouragement)*

I would like to look at this much needed ministry in the church and in our world today.

Randy Poole (A Missionary in Nicaragua) sums up the importance of encouragement and the difference it makes in a life when he wrote

*Amidst the morning mist of the swift returning tide
I set out on my daily run, my Walkman on my side.
Lost within my private world apart from cares and woes
I ran along the moistened shore, the sand between my toes.*

*In the distance, I saw a boy, as busy as can be.
He was running, stooping, picking up, and tossing in the sea.
Just what he threw, I couldn't tell, I looked as I drew near.
It seemed to be a rock or shell — as I approached him I could hear:*

*"Back you go, where you belong. You're safe now hurry home.
Your family's waiting for you, little starfish, hurry on!"
It seemed the evening tide had washed the starfish on the shore,
And the swift receding water left a thousand there or more.*

*And this self-appointed savior, was trying one-by-one
To toss them back into the sea, against the racing sun.
I saw his plight was hopeless, that most of them would die.
I called out from my private world, "Hey Kid, why even try?"*

*"Must be at least a thousand here, strewn along the beach,
And even if you had the time, most you'll never reach.*

You really think it makes a difference, to waste your time this way?"
And then I paused and waited, just to hear what he would say.

He stooped and took another, and looked me in the eye.
"It makes a difference to this one sir, this starfish will not die!"
With that, he tossed the little life, back where there was hope.
He stooped to take another. I could tell this was no joke.

The words that he spoke to me cut like a surgeon's knife.
Where I saw only numbers, he saw only life.
He didn't see the multitude of starfish on the sand.
He only saw the little life he held there in his hand.

He didn't stop to argue, to prove that he was right.
He just kept tossing starfish in the sea with all his might.
So I too stooped, and I picked up, and I tossed into the sea,
And I thought, just what a difference, that this boy has made in me.

Question: Do you know someone who needs some encouragement? Are you making a difference in someone's life by encouraging them? Lets look at the gift of encouragement and lets begin by looking at

I. What encouragement means

To encourage means to "come along side of." It is from the same word as Paraclete which is a name of the Holy Spirit the "one who consoles, one who intercedes on our behalf, a comforter or an advocate")

If we are going to encourage others, we need to come along side of them and help them. The word can mean that we come along side of them to urge or admonish (or caution) them. An important part of encouraging another person is the willingness to step in and walk beside them.

People will take better to being admonished if they know you are in, or willing to get, into the trenches with them. Someone wrote, "Encouragement is the kind of expression that helps someone want to be a better Christian, even when life is rough... To encourage is to inspire another with courage."

II. Why we need encouragement

Encouragement is a very important part of life. We all need to be inspired with courage- we all need our hope continually renewed, especially when we experience trials. Likewise, we need affirmation to stimulate us in the ordinary duties of life.

There is nothing like the support of having someone come and "stand next to" you when you are in need. We need to know we are loved, that we are doing a good job.

We need encouragement when the going gets tough, when others doubt us, and when we begin to doubt ourselves. When life becomes difficult, it is encouragement that enables us to approach the difficult with joy. Encouragement helps combat and overcome the negative aspects of life. Encouragement is instrumental to good mental and physical health. Those who are encouraged can much more easily receive instruction and correction, and may even desire it.

On the other hand, when we fail to receive regular encouragement from God and others, we are plunged into spiritual darkness; the journey along the road of life becomes difficult and can seem impossible. Despair begins to eat away at us, hope is diminished or lost, and deep fatigue can set in. We find it difficult, if not impossible, to receive correction or to give it without anger.

Failure seems imminent. We become so focused on our "failures" that we often fail to recognize success when it stares us in the face. As we focus on our "failures," we see ourselves as worthless.

Often, we do not recognize God's love and find it difficult to receive encouragement from others; we think they are being insincere or that they do not really see the whole picture. The truth is we are the ones who are blinded. When we refuse to receive encouragement from God and others, depression may set in accompanied by anger, rage, or apathy.

III. Why encouragement is cheap, but priceless

I Thessalonians 5:11 says *Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing.*

Hebrews 10:24 NLT says *Think of ways to encourage one another to outbursts of love and good deeds.*

I read where the following is from a little book called *God is in the Small Stuff*.

People seldom think of encouragement as a gift because it seems so ordinary. But actually, it isn't. Encouragement is actually quite rare {because it is seldom given} and it is so valuable {because it is so meaningful to the recipient}. So why is it so cheap yet so priceless. First because

1. It's free.

Encouraging someone requires absolutely no cash outlay. This doesn't mean there is no cost. It may cost you time creativity, and thoughtfulness. But all of that is what makes encouragement so appreciated. It requires something from you, not just something from your wallet.

2. It requires no shopping.

You do not have to make a trip to the mall for this gift. Many times this gift can be delivered from the home or the office. Writing a note of support or making an encouraging phone call may be all that's necessary.

3. It doesn't have to be gift wrapped.

Attractive wrapping adds to the appeal of a gift, but none is needed with encouragement. It is a beautiful all by itself.

4. It can be custom-designed.

You don't have to worry about sizes. But you must still give some thought to making your gift of encouragement a perfect fit. You have to think about some details--what are the best words of comfort, motivation, or support the person needs to hear.

5. It doesn't require batteries.

So many gifts require batteries as an energy source. Not so with encouragement. It creates and energy all by itself. If you don't think so, just watch the increase in activity when you motivate someone with a kind and supportive comment.

6. It will last a lifetime.

Think about it. What other gift could you give to a child that will have value for years later? Encouragement can do just that. A little word can make a big difference, and the results can be life changing,

Oh there is one more thing about encouragement. No one ever gets too much of it. So don't be stingy. Give it often!

On June 18, 1956, a freak accident happened on a lake in New York. A speeding motorboat bounced on a wave and shot into the water two of its passengers, a 50-year old man and a little girl. To keep her from drowning, the man held her head above water while

the boat circled back. They rescued the girl. But the man sank and drowned. That's how Dawson Trotman died, the founder of the Navigators, an international discipleship ministry. According to a quote in Time Magazine, "He lived to save others. His death was just the way he would have planned it." I read somewhere that his obituary reads like this: "Dawson Trotman, always lifting someone up." At his funeral, Billy Graham summed up Trotman's life this way: "I think Dawson Trotman had personally touched more lives than anybody that I have ever known."

Think of it this way, You too can touch other people's lives.

Charles Swindoll wrote, "I know of no one more needed, more valuable, more Christ-like than the individual who is committed to the ministry of encouragement."

William Barclay wrote, "It is easy to laugh at men's ideals; it is easy to discourage others. The world is full of discouragers. We have a Christian duty to encourage one another. Many times a word of praise or thanks or appreciation or cheer has kept a man on his feet. Blessed is the man who speaks such a word." Now that's a legacy.

Challenge: Would that be yours, too? That you live to save others? That you always lift someone up? That you exercise "The Power of Encouragement." It can literally save lives from the pit of destruction, disappointment, and depression. **Someone wrote**, "People live by encouragement. Without it they die. Slowly... Sadly... Bitterly."

Now when I got started today I entitled the message is your nickname Barney? Friends give us nicknames either to shorten our names, to point out a facial or bodily feature or to highlight a character quality in us.

Joseph earned the name "Barnabas" for his unselfish, sacrificial act of selling his field to support others. "If we would get a nickname for who we are or what we are doing, what would be it? If our life would be reduced to a name, what would be it?"

Would it be Barnabas or Barabbas?

We need more encouragers like Barnabas because there are enough thoughtless and selfish traitors like Barabbas in our world. Would you however be a Barnabas to others?

Lets close with Mary Engelbreit's encouraging little poem

*As you travel through life there are always those times
When decisions just have to be made,
When the choices are hard, and solutions seem scarce,
And the rain seems to soak your parade.*

There are some situations where all you can do
Is simply let go and move on,
Gather your courage and choose a direction
That carries you toward a new dawn.

So pack up your troubles and take a step forward —
The process of change can be tough,
But think about all the excitement ahead
If YOU can be stalwart enough!

There might be adventures you never imagined
Just waiting around the next bend,
And wishes and dreams just about to come true
In ways you can't yet comprehend!

Perhaps you'll find friendships that spring from new things
As you challenge your status quo,
And learn there are so many options in life,
And so many ways you can grow!

Perhaps you'll go places you never expected
And see things that you've never seen,
Or travel to fabulous, faraway worlds
And wonderful spots in between!

Perhaps you'll find warmth and affection and caring
And somebody special who's there
To help you stay centered and listen with interest
To stories and feelings you share.

Perhaps you'll find comfort in knowing your friends
Are supportive of all that you do,
And believe that whatever decisions you make,
They'll be the right choices for you.

So keep putting one foot in front of the other,
And taking your life day by day ...
There's a brighter tomorrow that's just down the road —
Don't look back! You're not going that way!

A little encouragement will go a long way! If you are not an encourager, if you are instead a "I knew it would not work", or an "I told you so" person, it is time to get on the encouragement band wagon.

We are called to be a blessing to others. Whose life are you blessing with encouragement? Come on Barney lets get going, there's work to do.

Before we leave this issue of encouragement I suggest that you read a bit farther and find some material in these lines that will lead you to the one who can indeed encourage your troubled heart. Read, think about, and apply and eternal encouragement can be yours.

Realize you are a sinner Romans 3:23

Understand that the payday for sin is death or eternal conscious separation from God. Romans 6:23a

Know that there is a way of escape for you. Romans 6:23b and John 1:12

Desire to escape and pray this or a similar prayer.

"Dear God, I know I am a sinner. I am truly sorry for my sins, and I confess them all to You [name them]. Lord Jesus, forgive all my sins and come into my heart as my Saviour and Lord. I receive You right now. Help me from this time forward to live for You. Thank You for hearing and answering my prayer. In Jesus' name. Amen."

On the _____ day of _____ I became a Christian by inviting Jesus Christ into my life to forgive my sin.

Signed: _____

If you have further questions or have chosen to do this, be sure to let us know so we can help you, pray for you and encourage you in your new life.

You can reach us at lapeerchurch@gmail.com Subject line: (Salvation)