

# Becoming the Servant of Encouragement: Generosity

Acts 4:32–37

February 2, 2025

Rev Joe Sanders

First Baptist Church Coshocton, Ohio

There has been a number of things happening this past week. I'm thinking of the on going wildfires in California, but the two plane crashes have been the most discouraging. It is heartbreaking to hear and see this kind of news. We all need encouraging.

I've mentioned that Barnabas was one of my Bible heroes. We share the same name, Joseph was his given name. But, he's also heroic for several spiritual reasons. He's generous, he takes risks, he affirms people, he follows the Holy Spirit, and he's an encourager. Throughout this month we'll be looking at Barnabas and what he can teach us about being encouraging.

***Acts 4:32–37 (NIV) All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.***

**Among Jesus' disciples there is a connection between encouragement and generosity.** Do you think you would have been excited to be part of the early church? This description of the people, the power of God, and the transformations are dramatic. Just reading these words fills my mind with delight. This is the spiritual equivalent of being national champions. It is a group of people working toward a common end.

This passage is about several different things: the unity of believers, God's grace and blessings being on the believers, the power of the proclamation of the Gospel, the unselfish attitude toward property and things, people providing the essentials so others can live, and Barnabas the encourager.

Barnabas was called an encourager, but he might have been the first to demonstrate this remarkable generosity. Barnabas was a Jewish Levite who served in the Temple. There were various tasks he might have performed from assisting the priests with the sacrifices to cleaning up after the sacrifices.

These are the responsibility of every person born in the tribe of Levi. They might be musicians and singers or candle lighters and keepers of the oil. They might be the coordinators and schedulers of activities. They might be the accountants and bookkeepers or scribes and teachers focused on the Old Testament Law.

They lived in various places and would come to Jerusalem to serve in the Temple for a designated time. Barnabus lived on an island in the Mediterranean Sea called Cyprus. There was a large community of Jewish people living in Cyprus. We don't know what Barnabas did as a resident of Cyprus, but we know that he owned property.

I believe this passage brings to us one of many things which combine with encouragement. In this case I'm seeing generosity in a symbiotic relationship with encouragement. A symbiotic relationship were both parties need one another and benefit from one another. I'm saying to be generous is to be encouraging and to be encouraging is to be generous. Neither one has to be an aptitude or a spiritual gift. You don't have to be born as one who is generous or encouraging. Jesus will help you develop both of them if you are willing to follow the Holy Spirit.

God wants us to be united, generous in sharing the gospel in words and actions. This is part of the Holy Spirit's transforming power in the life of every believer.

As believers we are a combination of many qualities, characteristics, and skills. The Holy Spirit is sharpening our lives for God's glory. Wherever we are, whatever the circumstance God can work through us.

***Acts 4:36-37 (NIV) Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.***

**We often lose sight of how generosity encourages.** When others are generous toward you are you not encouraged? I'm not talking about the times when we expect to receive something: Christmas, Birthdays, or recognition for many years of service. I'm talking about those moments when you receive an unexpected gift, or word of encouragement, or a box of chocolates.

Something happens in your heart and you are blessed, you are encouraged. You view the giver of the gift differently. You view your life differently. Your spirit becomes more willing. But, so many times generosity doesn't feel genuine, but manufactured. Generosity at times feels more like an obligation. It doesn't feel like a gift. That's when we aren't encouraged.

This past December several churches came together to sing Christmas Carols and give away fruit baskets. There was an intentionality about the work, the baskets, the locations. There was planning, fundraising, and all the nitty-gritty.

When we went from door to door there was a genuine generosity and desire to encourage. As the doors opened, the person in the doorway was encouraged. Some might say they were touched. There was an uplifting of their spirit. Generosity was combined with encouragement and people were invigorated. It was seen on their faces. It was heard in their voices.

I have been made weary by the world in which I live. Now, I'm joining the chorus of negativity. So much of the negativity all around us results from a sense of me first. I keep hearing people ask what about me? Where's my share? What I'm I going to get? It is a very discouraging atmosphere. There is a stealing of our joy and hope. This atmosphere is easy to join. It's easy to jump on this bandwagon of negativity. It's easy to look for what we'll get.

The idea of giving is found among the few and not among the many. The power seems to lie in blaming others, criticizing others, and looking out for self. There is a shrinking sense of unity around being positive. Even those who seek to lift up others are criticized for their words and actions. People are divided more by what they don't have, then by what they have in common. Too many exercises in bringing people together to do good turn out be exercises in futility. People have forgotten how to encourage because they have failed to be generous.

***Acts 4:36-37 (NIV) Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.***

**Barnabas was being led by the Holy Spirit to be generous and encouraging.** Believers who listen to the Holy Spirit begin to see opportunities for ministry. The Holy Spirit was in the ear of Barnabas. He had drawn this man from Jewish worship in the Temple, where animals were sacrificed to remove sin, to faith in Jesus as the only sacrifice that was needed.

Barnabas was a transformed man, a forgiven man, a man that was united with others who had been forgiven, who were transformed from self-centered ideas and activities to people who were focused on Jesus, being generous, saving people from their sins, and lifting people up.

Barnabas was part of something that was bigger than himself and any piece of land that he owned. Barnabas and the other believers were united around Jesus. All that he had and all that they had was available to Jesus. They were listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit. They were responding in tangible ways. They were helping others with physical needs as well as their emotional and spiritual needs.

Hearing the Holy Spirit happens at any moment in any circumstance. I would like to tell you to go into your prayer room and you will hear the Holy Spirit speaking. I'm not saying it won't happen, but you can't manufacture the work of the Holy Spirit. You can't tell God what to do. He is the creator of all things. He is the ruler of all things. When the Holy Spirit speaks is when you need to respond. It's when I need to respond.

Every believer needs to spend time in their prayer room, away from the world, reading scripture and talking to Jesus. Every believer needs to listen for the Holy Spirit to speak. The Holy Spirit will speak whether you are ready or not. The Holy Spirit will nudge you, prompt you, and move when you need to act.

This is what happened to Barnabas. When the Holy Spirit spoke, sell your field and give the funds to Jesus, Barnabas acted. In a few weeks we'll dig in to this deeper.

Generosity is encouragement in action. This was Barnabas, generous and encouraging. All the believers were one in heart and mind. They all knew selling a field and making the funds available to help others was God's will. It was being like Jesus. It was following the Holy Spirit. All the believers were encouraged. The families in need were encouraged. Hope was abundant.

The connection between generosity and encouragement moves people to trust Jesus.

***Acts 4:36-37 (NIV) Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.***

**Whenever the Holy Spirit leads you, be generous in your speech and actions.** Our generosity and encouragement speak with tangible actions that the gospel is true. I can talk about Jesus all day long. But, that doesn't always open hearts and spirits to Jesus. Words are one thing, an important thing. People need to hear the Word of God, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They need to hear that

Jesus gave His life in place of our lives to pay the penalty for our sin. They need to know that Jesus rose from the dead redeeming us from the power of sin. They need to know that Jesus delivers us to a new life for eternity.

Too many people don't believe words. They believe actions. They are encouraged by the generosity of Christians. That doesn't mean that every generous action is followed by a person coming to Jesus. It does mean that every act of generosity helps paint a picture of our living Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Some people see the picture with just a few strokes of the paint brush. They choose Jesus. Others don't see Jesus until the painting is almost finished. One act of generosity followed by other acts of generosity and speaking the name Jesus, draws people away from their sin, their negativity, and their selfishness. There is no Savior but Jesus.

God started the generosity/encouragement movement. From the beginning God has been generous and encouraging. His greatest act of generosity happened when Jesus, His Son came to the world. Jesus demonstrated the generosity of God when He died on the cross instead of us. The Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead continuing God's generosity. We have the Holy Spirit if we believe in Jesus who keeps nudging us to be generous and encouraging.

I know you are weary. I know that so often we feel helpless to make a difference. I know that you have given of yourself over and over again.

I'm asking you for the glory of God, to honor Jesus, and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.

No matter your circumstances remember we are of the same Spirit. We are disciples of Jesus. We have been given His grace, mercy, and love. We can be generous and encouraging as we listen and follow the Holy Spirit.