

# Why the Holy Spirit Wants to Build This Ministry Into Your Life

As a teenager, I worked part-time in my dad's company, Builder's Hardware, in Tampa, Florida. Fascinated by the forklift, I watched with envy as my older brothers and other employees unloaded pallets of hardware from trucks and hoisted them up on shelves in the warehouse. Sadly, I was never legally old enough to operate the machine. Instead, I moved freight around the floor manually with a pallet jack. I always dreamed of one day driving the forklift. Well, two days after graduating from high school, I began traveling with an evangelist in full-time ministry, so I never got the chance. However, God gave me what I call a "forklift ministry"—lifting people up with singing, preaching, praying and writing.

A man in the first-century church had a forklift ministry that we should all strive to emulate. His given name was Joses (a form of Joseph), but he was such an encourager, the apostles nicknamed him Barnabas, meaning "son of consolation or encouragement." The Greek word *paraklesis*, translated "consolation," comes from the same root word as *parakletos* which is translated "Comforter" to describe the ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). So, Barnabas was clearly a spiritually uplifting person to be around.

Barnabas was a Levite from the Island of Cypress and is mentioned 29 times in the New Testament. Some sources suggest he was among the pilgrims in Jerusalem celebrating the Feast of Pentecost when 3,000 of them converted to Christ after hearing Peter preach (Acts 2:41). Regardless, he emerged as a prominent leader in the early church. Besides being an encourager, Barnabas was also extremely benevolent—"Barnabas ... sold a field he owned, and brought the money and placed it at

the apostles' feet" (Acts 4:36-37). He did an incredibly generous deed by selling his land and donating the proceeds to the church to help needy saints. Ironically, Ananias and Sapphira, perhaps seeing how he was blessed for it, did something similar and brought a curse on themselves (Acts 5). What was the difference? Motive. It's not just important what we do; it's also important why we do it. Barnabas sold his property and donated the profit out of the kindness of his heart with no ulterior motives. Ananias and Sapphira tried to deceive the apostles by lying about the sale price and tried to impress people with their "spirituality" and buy clout with the leadership. They were punished; Barnabas was rewarded. Motives matter to God.

While Barnabas played second fiddle to Paul as his preaching partner, he deserves a lion's share of the credit. After all, if it weren't for him, we may have never heard of the apostle Paul. Why? Barnabas stuck his neck out and vouched for Paul when others were afraid of him. Before his dramatic, Damascus-Road conversion, "Saul ravaged the church, entering house by house and dragging out both men and women and committing them to prison" (Acts 8:3). They suspected he was an imposter trying to infiltrate the church to attack them. Barnabas calmed their fears, and Paul was gradually accepted into their fellowship (Acts 9:26-30). What was the result? "Then the churches ... had peace and were built up. And walking ... in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied" (Acts 9:31). The forklift ministry was working well.

Soon, revival broke out in Antioch, and the apostles sent Barnabas from Jerusalem to help oversee it. "When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced and exhorted them all to remain with the Lord with a loyal heart. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith" (Acts 11:23-24s). Notice what he did there—he used his forklift ministry to "encourage them all." As a rising tide lifts all boats, God used Barnabas' gift to uplift the spirits of all the saints.

Then, realizing he needed help with the growing church, Barnabas went to Tarsus and recruited Paul. They returned and stayed in Antioch for an entire year, teaching and encouraging the church there (Acts 11:25-26). God moved so mightily, the locals coined a new term, calling the believers “Christians.” They meant it as a derisive slur or an insulting nickname. The term means “belonging to Christ” or “follower of Christ” and was worn as a badge of honor, not a stigma of shame. What if the modern church became so Christlike that we didn’t just call ourselves “Christians,” but we truly lived up to that great name?

Barnabas’ record isn’t totally stain-free. When he and Paul went on their first missionary journey, they took his nephew, John Mark, as their assistant (Acts 12:12, 25; 13:2-5, Col. 4:10). Midway through the trip, Mark went AWOL and deserted them. About three years later, Barnabas insisted they take Mark again on another tour, but Paul adamantly refused. The division was so deep between them, they parted ways—permanently (Acts 15:36-40). Barnabas and Mark took their own mission trip back to his native Island of Cypress. Paul found a new partner, Silas, and hit the road for Jesus.

We learn from this that even great spiritual leaders experience conflict, and people God uses in great ways are still very human. Barnabas vanished from the biblical record because Luke, who chronicled Acts, traveled with Paul. Years later, Paul must have seen his error because he wrote, “Get Mark, and bring him with you, for he is profitable to me for ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11b). Barnabas should be credited with encouraging his nephew even when Paul didn’t see his potential, because a more mature Mark later wrote the Gospel that bears his name. Once again, Barnabas lifted someone up who was down.

A clever church sign reads, “Don’t put people down except on your prayer list!” People are often beat down by life, circumstances, other people, the devil and their own negative

thoughts. They need to be uplifted. Jesus often sought out the downtrodden others shunned to boost their faith. “But You, O Lord, are a shield for me, my glory and the One who raises up my head” (Ps. 3:3). God wants to elevate the downcast, and He wants to use us to do it. May God give us all a spirit like Barnabas’—a “forklift ministry” that lifts people up. {eo}

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