

Underdogs

“Barnabas – The Upside Down Underdog”

Acts 4, 11, 13

Small Group Plan

For ten years I was a campus minister, first at Memphis state university and later at Southwest Missouri State. I did a lot of premarital counseling and performed a lot of weddings. I helped students prepare to begin, but I rarely was called upon when things were ending. This is because college students hardly ever divorced or died. But all this changed when I shifted from being a campus minister to being a preaching minister.

At the very beginning of my preaching career, my first funeral message was for a 10 year old girl who died due to a medical mistake. I was ignorant. I was inexperienced. I did not know what to say or do. So, I called an older, wiser minister. I asked, “*What do I say?*” He said, “*Get a pencil.*” and in that moment, and in many future moments, he was my mentor.

In 1992 Gary Collins wrote a book entitled, *You Can Make A Difference*. He tells of a team of analysts from Yale University who spent several years collecting research following people who were moving from youth, through middle age, into old age. One major idea emerged — mentoring. A mentor is someone who guides, corrects and serves as a model for someone younger. Stories of mentoring go back to Homer's ancient story of Odysseus who simply asked his good friend, whose name was “Mentor,” to counsel his young son while he was away. And the mentoring style hasn't changed much since that time. Mentors encourage and challenge their protégés to go beyond their comfort zone and to explore their potential. They listen and observe. They advise and encourage. And mentoring is never done quickly. It always takes time.

Forty miles south of Turkey, in the Mediterranean, is the small island of Cyprus. There a man named Joseph started a spiritual tidal wave that flooded the Roman world and changed history. And all Joseph did was mentor two men. One was an older teen that wrote down the story of Jesus. The other man Joseph mentored was a traveling tent-maker, a man who wrote 32% of the New Testament, planted dozens of churches and pioneered cross-cultural evangelism. The two men are Mark and Paul. And their mentor? Joseph's Greek name is Barnabas, which means encourager.

OPEN IT / INTRODUCE IT ...

- Who in your life acted as a mentor for you?
- What are some of the lessons they taught you?

LOOK AT IT / STUDY IT ...

— GENEROSITY —

Acts 4:33-37

³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴ that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. ³⁶ Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), ³⁷ sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

- What does Barnabas' spirit of generosity tell us about him? What character qualities usually go along with generosity?
- Barnabas could have brought the money to the elders and designated exactly how he wanted it used. Why did he instead leave it to the judgment of the apostles?
- Why does the story use the phrase "God's grace was ... at work" to describe the generosity of God's people?

— SECURITY —

ACTS 11:19-24

¹⁹ Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. ²⁰ Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. ²¹ The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. ²² News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³ When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. ²⁴ He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

- How would you explain the significance of Barnabas stepping outside his Jewish circle? What is he risking?
- Since he saw the vital importance of this ministry, how do you suppose Barnabas would respond to anyone who criticized ministry among the gentiles?
- Verse 23 says that Barnabas "saw what the grace of God had done." What did Barnabas see and how did he know it was God's work?

— HUMILITY —

ACTS 13

² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me **Barnabas and Saul** for the work to which I have called them” ...

⁷ Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for **Barnabas and Saul** because he wanted to hear the word of God ...

⁴² As **Paul and Barnabas** were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. ⁴³ When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed **Paul and Barnabas**, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God ...

⁴⁶ Then **Paul and Barnabas** answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.

- First, notice the order of the names — (v. 2) “**Barnabas and Saul**” and again in (v. 7) “**Barnabas and Saul**.” And then, notice the change (vs. 42, 43, 46) “**Paul and Barnabas**.”
- Why do you think that from this point forward Paul will be mentioned first?
- From what you know about Barnabas, how would he feel about this change?

USE IT / APPLY IT ...

- For whom are you playing the mentor role in your life today?
- How can generosity be an act of trust?
- Is it easy or difficult for you to talk, engage, and befriend someone who is not like you? Explain.
- Why does humility more easily work for some, but is more difficult for others? What do we need to know in order for humility to flow easily from us?
- Close in prayer Thanking God for the mentoring spirit in Barnabas that has been passed down through the centuries. Thank God for the Christians who stepped out of their comfort zone to include you and bring you friendship and relationship.