

Leaving a Legacy For Others By Mark Jarvinen

At a comparative religions conference, the wise and the scholarly were in a spirited debate about what is unique about Christianity. One suggested the incarnation of Christ – God becoming human in Christ. Another suggested the resurrection – Christ defeating death.

Then, as the story is told, **C.S. Lewis** walked into the room, tweed jacket, pipe, arm full of papers, a little early for his presentation. He sat down and took in the conversation, which had by now evolved into a fierce debate. Finally during a lull, he spoke saying, ***“What’s all this rumpus about?”***

Everyone turned in his direction. Trying to explain themselves they said, ***“We’re debating what’s unique about Christianity.”***

“Oh, that’s easy,” answered Lewis. ***“It’s grace.”***

The room fell silent. Lewis continued that Christianity uniquely claims God’s love comes free of charge, no strings attached. No other religion makes that claim.

After a moment someone commented that Lewis had a point, **Buddhists**, for example, follow an eight-fold path to enlightenment. It’s not a free ride. **Hindus** believe in karma, that your actions continually affect the way the world will treat you; that there is nothing that comes to you not set in motion by your actions. Someone else observed the **Jewish** code of the law implies God has requirements for people to be acceptable to him and in **Islam** God is a God of judgment not a God of love. You live to appease him.

At the end of the discussion everyone concluded Lewis had a

point. Only Christianity dares to proclaim God's love is unconditional - an unconditional love that we call grace. Christians boldly proclaim that grace really has precious little to do with us, our inner resolve, or our lack of inner resolve. Rather, grace is all about God and God freely giving to us the gifts of forgiveness, mercy, and love (Martin Dale, Sermon Central).

When through the Word, God's grace is bestowed on us and faith in Christ is gifted to us in baptism, we become reoriented to do good works – to focus on others instead of self. Listen to **Ephesians 2:8-10** –

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

It is from this outlook that we understand more about building a legacy of love to our neighbors. Today, let's look at the biblical character **Barnabas** and observe, by God's grace, the impact he had on those around him, and thus his legacy toward others.

I. BE WILLING TO SACRIFICE FOR OTHERS.

We first meet Barnabas in **Acts 4:36-37** –

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.

We learn from this passage that Barnabas' real name was “**Joseph**,” but that he had earned a nickname among the apostles by

virtue of his character – **“Bar – nabas” (Son of Encouragement)**. There must have been something sunny in this man’s disposition. He must have conveyed a **“glass half-full”** outlook on life to those around him. There must have been something **“life-giving”** about his presence and conversation. The nick-name undoubtedly fit the man. What if the way you and I acted determined our nick-names? That would be interesting – (or scary) right? In Barnabas, we meet a man known for giving encouragement and what’s the first thing we see him do? Apparently, of his own accord, out of the kindness of his heart, he sells a field and lays the proceeds at the feet of the apostles, ostensibly so that they could meet the needs of the poor among the community of faith. From his personal wealth, Barnabas helps others, and in so doing, brings encouragement to needy individuals, and dare I say the entire Christian fellowship. **This illustrates that part of leaving a Godly legacy for our neighbors involves sacrifice.** Parents sacrifice for their kids. Soldiers sacrifice for their country. Neighbors sacrifice for one another. You likely recall from Scripture the **Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37)** and how the definition of “neighbor” extends well beyond those who live next door and certainly involves personal sacrifice on their behalf.

Let’s ask ourselves, to what extent am I willing to sacrifice for a neighbor? How about a sacrifice for someone who doesn’t share my faith background, my nationality, ethnic background, or my socio-economic class? In the work place, would we help a co-worker meet a deadline by shortening our lunch break or staying later? Will I bring a meal to someone going through a difficult time? Shovel snow for someone who’s ill? Help someone with a financial need? What

are the **“good works which God prepared in advance for us to do?” (Ephesians 2:10)**. As individuals we can’t do all the good there is to do in this world, but which works have our names on them? The answer to this calls for prayer, discernment, intentionality, availability, and ultimately a decision to respond to a need that’s within our reach to address.

II. BE SLOW TO JUDGE OTHERS.

We turn to **Acts 9:26-27** and read:

²⁶ When he (Saul of Tarsus) came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.

In this passage we see that Barnabas was slow to judge Paul by his past actions. Giving him the benefit of the doubt based on his fearless preaching of Christ in Damascus, Barnabas gave him a chance to be used in ministry and brought him to the apostles for their approval.

In addition, we see Barnabas with a similar disposition toward **John Mark in Acts 15:36-39 –**

³⁶ Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.” ³⁷ Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, ³⁸ but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. ³⁹ They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus.

We can draw an application from these passages. It's fair to say that a grace perspective puts the best construction on another person's life by remembering that God is a God of **additional chances**. Aren't you glad that this is true? I sure am! I attended Bible School in California right after high school graduation and was anything but a spiritual giant. During the summer after my first year, the school was sending out a gospel team to recruit for the school. I was not asked to participate which was no surprise since I hadn't lived a "poster child" kind of life that first year at the Bible School. However, a young woman from Kansas named **Fern**, who was a college graduate and a mature Christian with integrity, had sensed potential in me and recommended me to the president of the school. **She was my Barnabas**. God used my experience on that team to begin shaping me for ministry. Fern believed in me and became part of my legacy.

III. BE EAGER TO INFLUENCE OTHERS.

After Stephen was stoned to death, becoming the first Christian martyr, people scattered and were sharing the gospel with others. Some even preached to Gentiles in Antioch. Read **Acts 11:22-24** – ***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.***

Barnabas influenced these new believers in their spiritual walk with the result that many more came to faith in Christ.

We need to realize that we're all going to die some day. Recorded in Scripture, we have such statements as **"you shall surely**

die” (Gen. 2:17); “The soul who sins shall die” (Ezek. 18:4); “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23); “When desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (James 1:15); “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). What conviction do these truths evoke from us? How burdened are we for the millions who still don’t know Christ? What is our heart for our neighbors whose eternal destiny is uncertain? Do we have a heartbeat for the lost? Each of us has a role to play, a gift to use, a word or kind deed to share that points the way to Jesus. What about using our influence to mentor others that God has placed in our life? We can assist others in their growth as Christians. Notice the text says that Barnabas **“encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts (Acts 11:23b).**

II Timothy 2:2 highlights this thought –

“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”

Your first reaction to this may be – **“Who has time for this?”** or **“Pastor, isn’t this your job?”** No one can do it all, but is there one person you can influence?

Early one morning, a man was walking on the beach. He was a writer who drew his inspiration from the beautiful sunrises, the rhythm of the waves, and the peaceful solitude. Usually the beach was deserted at sunrise, but on this particular morning a young man was there, reaching into the sand, picking up small objects and throwing them into the ocean.

“What are you doing?” the man asked.

The boy replied, ***“Throwing starfish into the ocean.”***

The curious author asked, ***“Why are you doing that?”***

The young man replied, ***“The sun is up and the tide is going out. If I don’t throw them into the ocean, they’ll die.”***

The writer, who had never noticed the starfish before, said, ***“There’s miles and miles of beach with thousands of starfish along each mile. You can’t possibly make a difference!”***

But as the young man picked up another starfish and threw it into the water, he said, ***“It made a difference for that one.”***

Who is that one person in whose life you can make a difference?
(Scott Kircher, Sermon Central).

IV. BE READY TO ADVANCE OTHERS.

Continuing in **Acts 11:25-26**, we read –

²⁵ Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶ and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

Notice that Barnabas, who had been appointed lead pastor in Antioch, sought out Saul in order that he might assist him in the work. Barnabas wanted to help Saul grow in his faith. However, as we know, **Barnabas and Saul later became Paul and Barnabas**. Paul became an apostle to the Gentiles and exceeded Barnabas in terms of influence. How did Barnabas respond? He accepted this reality for the good of the Kingdom cause and did nothing to stand in the way. Some people get tripped up in leaving a Godly legacy because they are too proud to allow others to advance beyond themselves.

Ask yourself these questions: “Who am I out for? Am I desiring to be used by God in whatever way He sees fit, or am I out to build my own reputation in the eyes of others? Am I building God’s Kingdom, or

my own kingdom?” When we, in humility, support the success of others in God’s Kingdom, we leave a legacy that will outlive us. We need the attitude of John the Baptist expressed in **John 3:30** – ***“He (Jesus) must become greater; I must become less.”***

As the life of Barnabas demonstrates, through sacrifice, not judging, influencing and advancing others, we leave a legacy for our neighbors that lasts, all for the glory of God. **A-men.**