

Embrace the Courage to Encourage

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Date: 05 November 2023

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- [0 : 00] I'm so glad that all of you are here with us today, whether you have been walking through these doors for quite some time or you're sitting here this morning for the first time ever.
- I am so glad that you're here. This message today has the power to nudge our lives and it has the power to transform the lives of those within your orbit.
- We're going to dive into a section of God's Word this morning that is full of suspense transformation and yes, even encouragement.
- We're going to be in the book of Acts chapter 9 verses 26 through verse 30 and we're going to be talking this morning about the life of a man named Saul.
- Yes, that's Saul, the one that we have been looking at who has been infamous for his persecution of the church. For the one who set out with arrest warrants, with extradition papers to go to Damascus and to arrest those who were followers of the way, those who were followers of Jesus Christ who said that he was the way, he was the truth, and he was the life.
- [1 : 15] And on the way to Damascus, a bright light from the sky comes down and in Galatians, I believe it is, Paul, the Apostle Paul says that there was a light that shone from heaven even brighter than the sun.
- And Saul, the arrestor on the way to Damascus, was the one who was arrested by none other than Jesus Christ. And so this Saul comes to know Jesus Christ as his Savior.
- God changes his life. He begins sharing the gospel where he was. He goes to Arabia for a period of time and learns at the very feet of Jesus Christ himself about who he is and about what Jesus was teaching the disciples as he was walking around this earth.
- And then Saul goes back to Damascus. He continues to preach the Word of God. And then Saul makes his way to Jerusalem.
- And Saul tries to connect with the church. You know that when someone comes to know Jesus Christ, it's only natural for them to look to become a part of a local church, for them to become a part of God's family.
- [2 : 32] You know, I begin to wonder when someone says, you know what? I came to Jesus. I know Jesus as my Savior. I'm a Christian, but I'm okay on my own. You know, I can worship Jesus on the lake.
- I can worship Jesus in the woods. I can worship Jesus anywhere. And yes, we can. But God says, don't forsake getting together with the rest of the body of Christ because that's where the real growth happens.
- That's where we encourage one another. And so Saul is on his way. Saul gets to Jerusalem. Saul tries to begin attending church with the body.
- And unfortunately, maybe there are still some churches today where you have to break into. You know, it's like, you know, you feel like you're, you know, you're one of those that you're breaking and entering because everybody knows everybody.

And I have had individuals who've come and said, you know, we tried to attend a church here or attend a church there. And we sat in the back and not a single person looked at us. Not a single person reached out to us and said, hello.

[3 : 45] And someone even came and said, you're sitting in my seat. You need to get up. And so you need, you know, it's almost like I feel like I was breaking and entering.

And so Saul comes. He tries to attend worship with the rest of the disciples. And they want nothing to do with Saul. Why?

They knew his past. Do you realize that there are a lot of people in our community? Now, we all have a past. But there are some who have a past, if you know what I'm saying.

And so Saul had a past. And so he tries to come into the church. And they said, no, no, no. You can't come to our church because you've got a past. Well, they were afraid of him because it was that same Saul who held the garments of the people who killed Stephen.

He was the same Saul that had tried to go out and arrest Christians, those who were followers of Jesus Christ. And so I know they were just trying to protect the church.

[4 : 49] They were trying to protect their own body. And maybe they thought it was a case of wolf in sheep's clothing. And maybe if Saul couldn't destroy the church from the outside, maybe he was going to come and try to destroy the church from the inside.

Now, I get it. You know, they were wondering about protecting the integrity of their church. But my question is, how far do we go to protect the flock?

And how far do we go to encourage and accept those whom God has done a work in their life? And so enter Barnabas.

Even Barnabas' name means son of encouragement. Take your Bibles and let's look at Acts chapter number 9 this morning. And we see in verse 26, and when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him and did not believe that he was a disciple.

But I love the way, and I won't say it like I did a few Sundays ago, but Saul. So don't you like it when you see that word?

[6 : 16] Because it is such a contrast. Something is going on, but something happens that makes things better. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles.

You know, it's Christians that intentionally encourage others that are used by God to advance his kingdom and to be used by God in such a mighty, mighty way.

So in verse 26, Saul comes to Jerusalem, and he tried to join together with the disciples who were worshiping there in Jerusalem, but they were all afraid of him, and they didn't believe that he was a disciple.

The thing was, they couldn't believe that Jesus could have gotten beyond his past. Isn't that a shame? Because didn't they know that Jesus was the God of miracles? Didn't they know that Jesus could take a blind man and make him see?

Hadn't they seen that Jesus could take a lame man and make him walk? Hadn't they seen someone who had been filled with demons? And he said, get out of him, and they did.

[7 : 30] They obeyed. So Jesus was a God of miracles, but they didn't believe he could work a miracle in the life of Saul.

And so they were afraid of him, which is understandable, because they had learned to be cautious. They had learned to protect the flock.

But how far are we willing to go to be able and be willing to encourage someone whom we see God working on?

You do realize that there are some people that God is working on, they still have a messy past, and they may even still have a messy middle. They may even still be messy now. But God's working on them.

God is convicting them. They know that there's something wrong about their life, and they know that there's something that they need. But herein lies the tension.

[8 : 29] How far are we going to go to do, to encourage, to be the supporter, to not only give good words, but also be doing like Barnabas, to be able to take them by the arm and say, here, let's learn about this Jesus.

Let's figure out how he can make a difference in your life. So let's move to verse number 27.

Here's the thing. We have got to learn to build bridges. We are in a world where it's so much easier to build walls than it is to build bridges.

Look at verse 27. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles, and he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

So what we see here is what Barnabas is doing is he takes him and he brings him.

[9 : 39] The same word that we saw earlier when Paul, Saul, was out getting these papers to arrest people. He was laying hold of them.

And we find out later when Paul is giving his testimony, and he's talking about when Jesus met him on the road to Damascus, Paul says, I am moving, I am moving toward that direction for which Jesus laid hold of me.

That same word laid hold of is the word here in verse number 27 where Barnabas laid hold of Paul, and it's almost like he probably took him by the arm and he said, Let's go.

I will take you to the apostles, and I will let them know that you have been preaching, you have been sharing the gospel, and I am going to advocate for you.

So he takes the initiative to build bridges. You know, it's so easy today for us to put up walls. You know, we erect them for our security, for our comfort, and for the illusion of purity.

[11 : 05] But Jesus, what did Jesus do? Jesus was the bridge builder. Jesus saw the chasm between you and between God the Father.

He left the glory of heaven to come down. He crossed the chasm. He came and he was born of a virgin, and he lived among men.

And when he began his ministry, what did he do? He did the opposite that the religious people were doing.

They had built their walls. They had said, We don't want that kind here. We don't want to rub shoulders with that kind, because if we do, we're going to get dirty.

But what did Jesus do? Jesus tore down the wall. He crossed the chasm, and he went to those, not only with the past, but those with the bad present. And what did he do?

[12 : 07] He built the bridge. He said, I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life. No man comes to the Father, but through me. And he says, I'm offering you, excuse me, I'm offering you water, that if you drink of this water, you will never thirst again, just like the woman at the well.

He was talking to a woman that was trying to slake her thirst with relationships that couldn't satisfy. She had tried relationship after relationship after relationship, and they didn't satisfy.

She was still wanting something, because there was still a God-sized void in her life. And Jesus said, I'm offering you something that if you experience it, it'll be all you'll ever need.

Because I am all you need. All we need is God and what he chooses to provide. Jesus was not a wall builder.

Jesus was a bridge builder. And so let's take the initiative to build bridges. Now my question is, who are the Saul's in your life?

[13 : 23] It could be a neighbor. It could be a co-worker. It could be Uncle Fred, the black sheep of the family. Who's the Saul in your life that you could go and you could grab by the arm and say, hey, let me bring you to Jesus.

Hey, let me show you a better life. Who can we advocate for? Who can we build a bridge to and say, let me share Jesus with you?

I know a place where you can come and you will be accepted. Now we'll expect Jesus to start working in your life. You know, we expect your life to change when you meet Jesus.

But just like Jesus, we see people the way God sees them. We see, we don't see their past, but we see their potential. See, when God looks at us, He sees what we can be through Jesus Christ.

He sees what we can be when the Holy Spirit grabs a hold of us and comes in and He cleans house and He makes us more like Him. So let's take the initiative to build bridges.

[14 : 33] But look also in verse 27. What did He do? Barnabas took Him and He brought Him. Barnabas didn't just give some nice platitudes to Saul to say, Saul, you know what?

Just keep plugging at it. You know, just keep trying. Eventually one day they'll, you know, they might let you in. You know, just keep pushing. One day you'll break through and they'll let you in.

No, what did Barnabas do? Barnabas goes and he advocates for the most unlikely person that he could have advocated for and he says, let me bring you to the apostles and let me plead your case for you.

One of the things that Barnabas understood about the body of Christ is that we are not a country club of the perfect. We're a home of the redeemed.

And so, when we think that we're protecting the purity of the church by keeping certain people out, what we don't realize is the moment you stepped in, you made it impure.

[15 : 50] But you say, well, I don't do this and I don't do that. Well, that's okay. Did you ever, were you ever jealous? Did you ever get upset with anybody? Did you ever call anybody a fool? Did you ever maybe have a little bit of pride?

About how good you were? Matter of fact, God called, God puts that sin of pride right along with murder, right along with all those other unsociable sins.

And so, the moment that we stepped in, we, you know, we kind of, we kind of made it impure. Why? Because we're a human being. We have, we still have a sin nature. But Barnabas saw, saw through the eyes of Jesus.

He said, yes, Saul, I know what you were like. I know you tried to destroy the church. But I saw something in you. I see something in you.

I see a better future. And Barnabas is saying to Saul, Saul, I see that God is working in your life. And he's already worked in your life. So he takes him, he takes him by the arm, he brings him to the apostles, and look, look how he advocates.

[16 : 55] He declared to them, verse 27, how he had seen the Lord on the road. He had spoken to him. And so what he does is, he, he recounts Saul's testimony.

And, and he had spoken to him and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. You know, here's the thing.

We all love a good redemption story. after. You know, we love the, we love the before, and we love the after.

You know, the great transformation. But it's that messy middle that nobody likes. Do you realize that it's in the messy middle that God does his best work?

When God's still working on people, and sometimes someone is going to do something that is just something that they would have done before they came to know Jesus, and everybody goes, oh, hey, they're just, they're, they're in process.

[18 : 11] How many of you have children? How many of you remember that there was a time when you had to do something really nasty? It's called changing a diaper.

And, don't look, don't look at me funny, guys. How many of you actually changed a diaper? I know some guys that wouldn't do it.

They made their wife do it. Why? Because they were too afraid to get a little messy. And we're that way sometimes. Are we not? We're afraid to get messy. But just like you love your child, you were willing to get a little messy with them because you saw a future.

You saw their potential. And sometimes God will bring someone in and they've got a past. Holy Spirit's working on them. You might hear a few choice words every now and then.

They might have an attitude that's a horrible attitude. But you know what? If God's still working on them and we're able to be willing or we're willing to say, you know what?

[19 : 25] Because what does the Bible say that we are to do with one another? We are to put up with one another. We are to bear with one another. So, you know, sometimes we just put up with one another.

And this may come as a shock, but you guys have to put up with me sometimes. Right? And so we're all that way. We all, we're all different. And so, sometimes we just simply need to advocate for someone.

You know, we love the, we love the remarkable transformations. We love the aftermath. But we want someone else to take them through the middle part to where we can see them when they're all cleaned up and nice looking.

And so Barnabas goes to Saul and he says, come on, let's go. I see the potential in your life. See, advocacy requires vision.

Advocacy requires us seeing people through the eyes of God where we don't see a past, but we see a potential. So we, he advocated for him.

[20 : 32] And then look at verse 28. So he was with them. So Saul was with the body of Christ at Jerusalem. He was coming in and going out.

So it's not always easy to foster community. It's an intentional thing. What are we, what are we, what are we seeing in verse number 28? After Barnabas advocated for Saul, brought him to the apostles.

See, he didn't bring, he didn't bring him to the church body as a whole. He brought him to the apostles. And then the apostles probably go to the church and say, listen, listen people, listen folks, let's accept Saul because Barnabas sees something in him.

Now Saul was taking, Barnabas was taking his reputation on Saul. So the apostles go to the church and they say, you know what, let's give him a chance. And so Saul comes in, verse 28 says, he was with them.

There's a difference between with someone and being with someone. community is all about accepting one another, authenticity, encouraging one another, and being there for one another.

[21 : 50] They were all there. It's not always easy to foster community, but it's intentional. So what's going on is the early church was eating together.

They were praying together. They were spending time hearing God's word together. They were sharing the gospel together. They were hurting together.

They were laughing together. And sometimes they were probably even arguing together. But that's called family, is it not? And so where they were is they weren't...

Community is not just simply sharing beliefs. It's sharing our hurts, our pains, our joys, our aspirations, our hopes, our failures, our fears.

See, that is real community. It's something that we have got to work together on. So he was, in verse 28, with them at Jerusalem.

[23 : 01] He was coming in and going out. Now I want you to look around you. Who's on the sidelines still? Who is trying to break into the body?

We're of a size where you should know everybody's name. We're of a size where when we mention so-and-so, you don't go, who's that?

Let's see, they've been here for the past four weeks. You should know them. See, community is intentional. Community is going out and reaching out and who is, what, who do we know most about?

Ourselves, right? And so, when we go and when we reach out and we engage with someone, what is the trap we typically fall into?

We talk about ourselves. But what about if we engaged with people and made it all about them?

[24 : 14] We're so glad. I'm so glad to get to know you. Tell me about yourself. I mean, there are some people, literally, there are some people that you give them ten minutes with somebody and they'll be able to tell you their life history.

Why? Because they engage with people. They ask questions. friends. They get to know them. They dig deep. Now, I will admit this.

I am not a person that by nature is one that is conversational and likes to dig deep. But it's something that we can learn. It's something that we can work on and make it about someone else.

So, Saul was with them. He was going in, he was going out. He was sharing the gospel. He came back in to be encouraged. He went back out to share the gospel. He came back in to be encouraged and probably encouraged the others.

And you know, here's the thing. I can envision it. Saul, was Saul ever, how do I put this, was Saul ever a floater in the Christian life?

[25 : 31] You know what I'm talking about? someone who just, I guess, a coaster. You just kind of coast along the Christian life. No, Saul comes in and he wants to do what?

Let's do it. Let's go out. Come on. What are you guys waiting on? That's when I see Saul, that's the Saul that I envision. I see Saul as the one that was always instigating them to do something.

I see Saul as the one that was always pushing them to go out and do more for Jesus. You mean you haven't been there? Come on, let's go. To me, that was Saul because when we see Paul the apostle, when we see him in Ephesians and Galatians and Corinthians and the New Testament, we see Paul going.

And what was Paul's goal? Paul's goal was to go where the gospel had not ever been named. Paul's goal was to go not, you know what, I'll go and I'll go find this cushy, comfortable church somewhere and I'm going to become a part.

No, Paul said, let's go, let's go to the front lines. In fact, let's advance beyond the front lines. Let's go into enemy territory. That's what Paul did.

[26 : 42] Paul went and he decided he was going to be all in for Jesus Christ. So, let's be bridge builders.

Let's bridge the gap between those who need Jesus, bring him to Jesus. Let's not build walls, let's build bridges. Let's advocate for the unlikely ones.

Advocate for those that may, let's be willing to look beyond our fears and our prejudices and advocate for those that maybe even make us uncomfortable because Jesus made the religious people uncomfortable in his day.

But Jesus still went, he built bridges. Let's foster authentic community. Get to know one another. Come on, we got a gumbo fellowship coming up on the 12th.

Who doesn't like to eat? When we eat together, we can get to know one another. And here's my challenge to you. Don't sit with somebody you know. Don't sit with someone that you always sit with.

[27 : 54] Go find someone who may have been on the sidelines. Go find someone who you know what? Maybe they've not been a part of the faith family for 30 years. Maybe they're a fairly new family.

They've been here for six months or a year or maybe just last week they showed up. Let's go find out about them. Let's I mean don't be creepy but try to figure out who they are.

Try to figure out do you have children? Do you have a family? Do you have a family? How did you come to know Jesus? If they don't know Jesus then what do you do?

You share Jesus with them. What's the gospel? The gospel is simply Jesus is the son of God. We're all sinners. He died on the cross for our sin and we are saved by grace through faith not of ourselves.

It's the gift of God lest anyone should boast. The Bible says all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. So foster authentic community. And then verses 29 and 30.

[29 : 01] We see in verse 29 and Saul spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists.

Do we see a pattern here? What was Stephen doing? You remember Stephen back a chapter or so ago? A couple of chapters. He went to the Hellenist synagogue, the synagogue of the Greek-speaking Jews.

And he gets into a debate with them about Jesus and probably about grace and they didn't have to become a Jew and they didn't have to be circumcised. They didn't have to go through all these rituals and it's by grace through faith.

And they got upset with him. Ultimately they trumped up charges. They found some witnesses to come and lie and they end up murdering Stephen. And what does Saul do?

The same thing. He goes to a Greek-speaking synagogue because Saul was from Tarsus. Saul was from a Greek-speaking area. He was a Jew but he was a Greek-speaking Jew.

[30 : 09] And so Saul does the same thing. He goes in verse 29, he spoke boldly in the name of Jesus, disputed against the Hellenists and they did the same thing.

They tried to kill him. But yet he was still bold. He was still bold. When the brethren find out they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.

So he championed a bold faith. He was willing to go out. He was willing to share the gospel with others. We need to be ready. We need to be willing to support one another as we become bold in our faith.

Share Jesus. You might have someone in your family. You might have someone at work. You might have someone in your community that you think and that people think, you know what, they're just too far gone.

They're too hard-hearted. I just don't think they would ever trust Jesus as their Savior. After all, they claim to be an atheist. I mean, come on. What's the point?

[31 : 22] Well, the point is, God is still in the business of saving souls. Is He not? Jesus is still in the business of through His Holy Spirit softening people's hearts.

God can take something that you said to someone ten years ago, five minutes ago. Next week, a year later, ten years from now, when Jesus waits to come back, God can use that to change their heart, to change their life.

So let's champion a bold faith. And what did the church do? They risked their life. When they found out that these Greek-speaking Jews wanted to kill Saul, well, what happened in Damascus, you remember?

They wanted to kill him there too. And so they found a time where they could let him out. They dropped him down over the wall, and so they risked their own lives. The believers there risked their lives to save Saul.

And so Saul comes to Jerusalem, and what happens? They risked their lives to whisk Saul out of Jerusalem. When the brethren found out, you think they had accepted him by this time?

[32 : 36] It sounds like it. When the brethren in Jerusalem found out, they didn't say, Saul, you better get out of here. What did they do? I think they learned a little bit from Barnabas, the son of encourager, or the son of encouragement.

So they were no longer afraid of him. They had accepted him. They had seen what God was doing in his life. Just like Barnabas, they grabbed a hold of Saul and they brought him down to Caesarea, most likely put him on a ship, and sent him to Tarsus.

I challenge you this week to find your one, to find your Saul, to find that person that God's Holy Spirit is working on. It may be that they might be an unlikely person.

you may need to step beyond your fears and your prejudices to bridge the gap. Jesus stepped out, he stepped through the chasm to build a bridge for us so that we can be reconciled with his father.

So this week it might be that we see someone that, let's not walk past the chasms in our community, let's not walk past the chasms in our church, let's not walk past those whom God wants to work with, and maybe we can be the Barnabas in their life, we can encourage them to say, let's see what God can do in your life.

[34 : 18] So let's be bold, let's be championing a bold faith, a faith that moves mountains, a faith that is willing to storm the gates of hell, and a faith that declares our God reigns.

Amen? Amen. Father, this morning I pray that your Holy Spirit may be able to work in our lives just as in the life of Barnabas, this son of encouragement who didn't see the past but saw the potential in a man named Saul who later you would use to be an apostle that would change the world for Jesus.

Father, maybe there's someone that you are calling us to encourage, to be with, to advocate for, to come alongside and be with and encourage them to take those bold steps of faith.

And Father, may we be able to see maybe that next Saul in our life might be the next world changer, that God can use a nobody to impact somebody that might just change the world.

We thank you, Father, for what you're going to do in our lives. Father, give us, help us have the grace to step out and to serve others.

[36 : 06] And we serve you by serving those around us. We thank you, we praise you, in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen.