



BelPres Church

CEO

Speaker: Pastor Scott Dudley

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Great to see all of you here. Thank you for being here on Sunday. The Psalmist said, I rejoice when they said, "Let us go to the house of the Lord. It is good to be in worship." So thank you for being here. Thank you for joining us, those of you online. Just before I preach, I want to do kind of one of our quarterly family updates on where we are with the unleashed projects and our budget and all of that stuff. We're committed to transparency and updating you on that once in a while.

Back in September, we asked the question, what could we do if we were a tithing congregation? And we talked about eight projects that we feel God calling us to do. And some of those projects, a lot of them are already underway. The Anchor & Flame Spiritual Mentoring Program, we've matched people. They're off and they're running. We had our first one roof a couple weeks ago. We're going to have another in July.

We are seeing people engaging in this that have never engaged in anything before and not just with their money, but also their time and their influence and their talents. One person stepped up who's an expert in the field, given us her time to help us create a sustainable model of affordable childcare. That would've cost us so much money, but she stepped up and did that.

In March, we told you that we were running ahead of budget and because of your increased generosity throughout the fall, we have actually met our budget already two months before the end of our fiscal year. That has never happened in the history of this church. So well done well done and thank you. The Holy

Spirit is making us a radically generous church. And this is what we talked about in the fall. What would happen if we were unleashed?

So now, everything that comes in from there on can go to those unleashed projects that require more capital. So I said, we're starting to work on the affordable childcare. This fall, we will have more refugee housing available. We're also saving money for the lobby expansion into the courtyard to create space for us to be together and be in community, especially on Sunday mornings when everyone is here to be able to sit around tables, eat together and all of that.

If you were here last week for the 10-year New Hope celebration, you know that we need that lobby. All of these things are possible because of your generosity. Now, the completion of these projects, they're still a long way off. So don't hear in this, "Oh, sweet. They're doing well. I can stop giving." No, because then we won't be doing well. And these projects we've been called to do, and we're a long way from completing them.

This is the vision God has given us. So continue to give. And because of your increased generosity, we have factored that into the new budget, which will begin September 1 and we're working on that to factor in your increased generosity. So please continue to give. If you're not giving, we encourage you to join us so that more refugees have houses so that people in desperate need of affordable childcare can find it and on and on. It's super exciting.

I think the Holy Spirit is moving and so many lives are being changed, and I just want to say well done, Bell Press, well done. Thus, into the family moment. All right, that was the family moment. Now we're going to preach the word of God. A few years ago, I told you, not that that wasn't the word of God, but you know what I mean. A few years ago, I told you a story which I'm going to tell you again today because it fits with the sermon and also because my sermon review team this week reminded me that nobody remembers what I say anyway.

So I can tell it as many times as I want. And it was about when I was first being the college pastor at my church in Silicon Valley, California. And I had told the church I was only going to do it for one year as an interim while they found someone to do it permanently. So because of that, I was never supposed to preach, which was fine with me because I didn't want to preach, right? Because I was going to be a professor of English literature, not a pastor. But then one

week the person who was supposed to preach that Sunday suddenly couldn't and it was Thursday and nobody else was available.

So in some meetings somewhere that I was not in, someone said, "How about Scott Dudley?" And the senior pastor said, "Who's that?" And they said, "Well, you know, the new college pastor." And he goes, "Oh, fine, fine." It was the end of August, which has low attendance there, not in this church, of course, but in spiritually inferior places, lower attendance in August. So I think the senior pastor figured, "Oh, how much harm can he do? It's August."

So I preached and after the first service, the senior pastor took me aside, he put his hand on my shoulder and he said, "You're anointed." I hadn't talked to him ever. And he said, "You're anointed. I can see it in you. There are three things you need to do to make that sermon better for the next couple of services." He gave me those three things. He put his hand on my shoulder again and he said, "You're anointed and you can be in my pulpit anytime." And he walked away and I thought, "I will follow him anywhere and I will stay as long as he wants me to stay."

His name was Walt and he had that effect on people. I always say I was Walted. And it wasn't just what he said, although that mattered, it was how he said it like he believed in me, like he saw something in me nobody else including myself saw in me and it was so encouraging. This summer, we're doing a sermon series called Power Up about people in the Bible who after the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came were powered up to do significant things. But in this series we're not going to be talking about the big names you hear a lot of in church, right? The Apostles Peter, Paul, James, not talking about those guys.

We're going to be looking at people that you don't hear as much about. People like Joanna and Ananias and Lydia. And today we're going to talk about a man named Barnabas, whose name means son of encouragement because the significant thing that Barnabas did was he encouraged people. Now for some of us you may go, "That's it?" He just encouraged people like he didn't like divide an ocean into or raise the dead or start a nonprofit? Nope, just encourage people. But that is one of the most significant and important things that we can do.

The word encourage in Latin means literally to put heart into, put courage into. And most of us from time to time need some kind of encouragement at least

sometimes. Two weeks ago, I was preaching at a week long family camp in California and when I got back, a friend of mine asked how it was and I said, "Well, I don't think my talks connected very well. I actually don't feel like I did a very good job." And so my friend said, "Oh, so you sort of spiraled down into discouragement?"

I said, "No, no, it wasn't so much circling the drain as it was a pencil dive from a 10-meter platform into the pool of despair." Not quite that bad, but you kind of get the gist. And then he said some encouraging things, which was helpful to me. But even if you are the kind of person that doesn't need a lot of encouragement, my wife, for instance, she's very secure in herself. She doesn't need a lot of encouragement.

Even if you're that way, there are still people in your life who do need encouragement, which you can give to them, especially Holy Spirit powered encouragement, which is different than just normal encouragement, right? It's way deeper than just saying nice things to people. Holy Spirit encouragement powers people up to live into who God created them to be. It's not just saying nice things.

In that story I told about Walt, he did not say to me, "You did a good job on that sermon." That's not what he said. He said, "You're anointed." That's a Bible word. That's a spiritual word because I think the Holy Spirit gave him insight to see something in me that I didn't see in myself and he changed the direction of my life. Without Walt, I wouldn't be a pastor. I would be teaching Shakespeare in some university somewhere.

So to paraphrase Singer Dolly Parton, I wouldn't be here if he hadn't been there. And he was so good at it. He was one of the best in the business. And he'd often say, "My job here is not to be senior pastor." I'm the CEO, Chief Encouragement Officer. And I need to say I've also had some wonderful encouragers in this church who have encouraged me in ways that have helped me grow and keep moving forward. And when we are listening, the Holy Spirit gives us insight and guides us to words and actions that change people's lives and then through those changed lives, change other people's lives and we leave a legacy and that's exciting to get to be a part of.

So who has given you, not just said nice things, but given you Holy Spirit encouragement that somehow went straight to your soul more than a

compliment and went straight to your soul. Thank God for that person. And then as we go through this sermon, ask the Holy Spirit, who can I give Holy Spirit encouragement to this week? So if you have a Bible, turn to Acts 9, or you can follow along on the screens and the background for what we're about to read is a man named Saul goes around arresting Christians, puts them in jail and he also aids and abets their murder.

Then Jesus shows up in a blinding light on the road to Damascus. Saul becomes a follower of Jesus, changes his name to Paul and Paul is arguably one of the most important people in history because Paul took this message of Jesus out of Israel and spread it around the Roman world and from there, it went to the rest of the world. So Paul is a really significant figure in human history and after he becomes a Christian, he goes to Jerusalem to meet Jesus' disciples.

So we're going to pick the story up in Acts 9:26, Acts 9:26. When he came to Jerusalem, that's Paul, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple, 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. So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem speaking boldly in the name of the Lord, but Barnabas.

The disciples are understandably afraid of Paul. He throws Christians in jail. He aids and abets their murder, but Barnabas. The rest of human history depends on those two words, but Barnabas saw something different and he did what encouragers do. We encourage when we believe in someone when others don't. At this point in Paul's life, the only person who's believing in him is Barnabas, because the Holy Spirit gave Barnabas insight to look at Paul and see a future apostle.

Everyone else looked at Paul and saw a restraining order, but Barnabas believed in him so much. He says to the disciples, "No, this guy's legit accept him." So Paul gets included in Christian community, which cements his faith so that he takes it to the Roman world and from there to the rest of the world. We wouldn't be here if Barnabas hadn't been there for Paul. And the other thing this shows is that we encourage people when we see in them something they and others don't see in themselves.

The Holy Spirit empowered Barnabas to see all the potential in Paul that nobody else saw beyond what is in the natural. There was a supernatural ability that Holy Spirit gave Barnabas to look inside Saul's soul and see things in him that nobody else saw. In my former church, one of the labels I was given was good college pastor but not a leader, not senior pastor material, which was fine with me because I didn't want to be a senior.

I didn't even want to be a pastor, let alone a senior pastor. And at one point I was on the senior leadership team of that church and then they did a reorg and kicked some of us off the senior leadership team of that church and that bummed out all the people that were kicked off the team, except for me, it delighted me. So I told the senior pastor, "I love this. Disempower me. Move me to the margins. Don't include me in decisions. I want to find out about things on Sunday morning during the announcements."

And after about two months, he put me back on the senior leadership team because in that chorus of voices saying that I was not a leader, there was one person singing a solo to a different tomb and that was Walt. And he would always say to me, "Don't listen to them. They're wrong. Last time I checked, you had several hundred college students following you. Kind of the basic definition of a leader is they have followers. You just don't come in a package that siliconvalley.com culture recognizes."

I think the whole ... Now, to be fair to all those people that said I wasn't a leader, given the evidence in front of them, they were right, but the Holy Spirit gave Walt some kind of insight to see something in me that nobody, nobody saw. Look at verse 28. It says, "So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem speaking boldly in the name of the Lord."

This is another thing that shows us about how we encourage people. We encourage people when we give them significant responsibility, even when they or others don't think that they're ready for it, not just to get a job done, but because we see something in them. Paul wastes no time starting to tell people about Jesus. He's given a role. Do you remember when someone first gave you the dignity of responsibility, asked you to do an important job, a parent, a grandparent, a coach, a teacher, a mentor.

It's so encouraging when we do that with people, especially when we back those people up as we ought and help them learn from their mistakes that they

will inevitably make. The most encouraging way we do that is to give them affirmation and critique, not flattery and complaint because there's a difference. Flattery is performance based. "Oh man, you're such a good student. You always get A's. Oh man, you're such a good athlete. You always catch the touchdown pass."

Now it's good to tell someone that they did a good job on something. That's a good thing to do. Not bad. It's a good thing to do. It's just limited because it's performance space. And it provokes the question, "Well, what if I don't get an A? What if I botch the next presentation at work?" And complaint is also performance based, "I don't like the way you do X, Y, or Z." And most of what we get in life is flattery and complaint, both of which are cheap versions of love, which gives affirmation and critique.

And affirmation is deeper because it's about the things that are true about a person regardless of their performance. I've noticed you're courageous. You're willing to do risky things. I've noticed you play the long game with people. You don't give up on them. That's affirmation. It's deeper because it goes to character. And critique doesn't say, "Wow, you really screwed that up."

Critique says that didn't go so well. What did you learn? Here's some ways you can improve. And most importantly, I know you can do it and I believe in you. Well, as the Book of Acts goes on, Barnabas and Paul become a preaching team all over the Roman world. So go forward a few more pages to Acts 12 because there's something that I want to show you there. Acts 12, starting in verse 25. I want you to just notice something.

When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem. Okay? Now go to chapter 13, verse two. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart from me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Okay? Go forward all the way to 13, verse 42. And here's the thing I want you to notice.

As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. Look at chapter 14:1. At Iconium, Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. So what's happened? The order of their names has switched. It starts out Barnabas and Paul, and then it switches to Paul and Barnabas. And in that culture, the name that came first was the leader and the second name was the follower.

Keep that in mind for later in this series when we talk about a married couple named Priscilla and Aquila and her name often comes first. Just saying that. And the switch in order from Barnabas and Paul to Paul and Barnabas shows that we encourage people when we celebrate their success even if it overshadows ours. Barnabas here graciously lays aside his leadership and lets Paul take the lead, and that must have been so encouraging to Paul.

In my former church, one time the senior pastor Walt came into an all staff meeting and he said, "I just heard the most wonderful news. There are more requests for CDs of Scott's sermons than there are for my sermons. Isn't that awesome?" And he meant it. And I thought, "Oh my gosh, who does this? "He believes in me so much, he's willing to take the backseat. That's so encouraging." And I recognize that for some of you CD, what is that?

It's a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away we used to use these things in the 2000s called CDs. Okay, let's keep moving through the text. Turn to Acts 15, one last passage I want to look at Acts 15 starting in verse 36. Sometime later, Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preach the word of the Lord and see how they're doing." Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark with them, but Paul didn't think it was wise to take him because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work.

They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord Jesus. What this shows us is that we encourage people when we give them second chances. Paul didn't want to take Mark on their journey because Mark had deserted them in a previous missionary journey. We don't know why he did that. He just did. And for Paul, that was it.

He didn't trust Mark because of that one mistake. But ever the encourager, ever the believer in people, Barnabas did not want to give up on Mark and wanted to give him a second chance, which caused such a huge rift between Paul and Barnabas that they parted company, which actually says more about Paul than it does about Barnabas. Because as you go through the New Testament, it turns out Paul has some big rifts with lots of people.

I don't know if this has ever happened to you, but has anyone ever kind of told you about all the relationships they've had that have gone bad, four or five, six

relationships that have gone south and then they'll say something like, "Can you believe my bad luck?" And you're like, "Well, there is a common denominator there." Paul was that person, abrasive, stubborn, frequently, rude. Now, God used him powerfully for sure, but nobody's perfect.

And this is sad because Barnabas has invested sacrificially in Paul and Paul just blows him off, which shows sometimes our encouragement will go unthanked, but we still need to do it anyway because it's the right thing to do. And in this case, Barnabas was right, not Paul. And we know that because at the end of Paul's life, when he is languishing in a Roman prison and he knows he's going to be killed for his faith, Paul writes a letter to his mentee, the person that he's been encouraging named Timothy, and he says, "Get Mark and bring him with you because he is helpful to me in my ministry."

So Paul is in jail and he knows he's going to be killed for his faith and of all the people he could have asked for, he asks for Mark the same Mark he gave up on in Acts 15. So clearly some kind of reconciliation has happened between Paul and Mark and Mark has become someone Paul could count on, become someone the Holy Spirit powered up to spread the good news of Jesus, but Mark became those things no thanks to Paul.

It was thanks to Barnabas who refused to give up on him. And see, Paul here forgets the lesson that Barnabas taught him because way back when Paul was still Saul and arresting Christians and aiding and abetting their murder, Barnabas gave Paul a second chance and introduced him to the disciples while Paul was aiding and abetting the murder of Christians for heavenly sake.

So do go on, Paul, about how Mark is unreliable because of this one little mistake. No, do go on Mr. Murderer about Mark. The cheek of this man. Again, God used him. He just had flaws like all of us, but Barnabas was there to breathe Holy Spirit, empowered, encouragement into Mark so he could become everything he was created to be. So to sum it up, we encourage people when we believe in them, when others don't, see something in them they don't see in themselves, give them significant responsibility, give affirmation and critique, celebrate their success even if it overshadows ours and give them second chances, and those are just some.

Those are just some of the ways that we can encourage other people. And it is so deeply rewarding to do that because we leave a legacy because Barnabas

encouraged Paul. Paul took the good news of Jesus to the world, which means led to us being here. When we give Holy Spirit encouragement, not just say nice things, Holy Spirit, empowered encouragement, we leave a legacy of lives change and through those changed lives, other changed lives. If I have ever said or done anything helpful here, you have Walt Gerber to thank for it, not me.

I wouldn't be here if he hadn't been there. So who has given you Holy Spirit encouragement? Thank God for that person today. Maybe if they're alive, thank them as well. And then how can you be CEO? Chief Encouragement Officer of someone else and leave a legacy of changed lives. Now, we can't give what we don't have. So in order to do this, we need to receive it ourselves from Jesus who is the greatest encourager of all time.

Does Jesus see potential in us we don't see in ourselves? Absolutely. Does he give us responsibility? Well, he said, "Go make disciples of all nations." Is that enough responsibility for you? Does he back us up? Yeah. His Holy Spirit equips and empowers us. Does he give us second chances? Uh-huh. And third and fourth and as many as we need. So this week ask Jesus two things. Jesus, what do you see in me that others don't? And then leave space for those thoughts that maybe aren't yours that come from him.

And then Jesus, who do you want me to give Holy Spirit powered encouragement to this week? Ask the Holy Spirit to give you spiritual insight to someone so that you can speak into their soul, not just nice things, but speak into their soul in a way that encourages them in a supernatural, holy way. After I finished seminary, I switched careers and got a PhD in English literature to be a professor. And along the way, as many of you know, my first wife left me. And after all of that, I was still following Jesus, but I was mostly focused on getting the PhD.

And I'd go to church about once a month, but that was it. I was as far away from Jesus as I've ever been since I started to follow him. Well, after about a year of this, a friend of mine who was a youth pastor called me and said, "I want you to be the speaker at my youth group's spring retreat." And I actually laughed and said, "That's so funny. No, no." And he goes, "No, Scott, I'm serious." And I'm like, "I am too. No, no."

He called me back a few days later and I said, "Still no." Answer, still no. Besides, I'm divorced, not sure I should be teaching anyone anything except for

Shakespeare. And I'm not very good with youth. I'm a nerd. I'm not cool. They won't like me. They'll hate me. He called me four different times to persuade me. And the final call after I gave him all my excuses, there was just this long pause and he said, "Scott, it's time to get back on the horse.

Yes, there are other people who could do this and I could ask them. I don't want anyone else for my students, for this retreat. I want you. I believe you have something to say and I want my students to hear it from you, not anyone else. It's time to get back on the horse." That's Holy Spirit empowered encouragement. He didn't just say nice things, right? He was handing me responsibility with these students that he loved because the Holy Spirit helped him see something in me I did not see in myself.

He believed in me. He was willing to back me up and so I did it and I loved it. I loved especially the conversations I got to have with the high school students and it awakened something in me. So later when I heard that my church in California needed volunteers to lead Bible studies for college guys, well, I volunteered to do that, which eventually led me to becoming a college pastor there, which led me to becoming here.

But here's the thing, I wouldn't be here if my friend hadn't been there to ask me to speak at that retreat. I wouldn't be here if Walt hadn't been there to encourage me. We are here today because Barnabas was there to encourage Paul. So this week, draw encouragement from Jesus and give it away like there's no tomorrow because when you do, you change lives and you leave a legacy so that sometime in the future someone will say to you, "I wouldn't be here if you hadn't been there."

Jesus, you are the greatest encourager of all time. So Lord, this week help us to draw encouragement from you, spiritual encouragement, the kind that goes deep into our souls and then Lord, give us spiritual insight into other people and those who you want us to encourage with your Holy Spirit powered encouragement that doesn't just compliment or flatter, but that goes to their soul and changes their life forever. We ask this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- What are some key take aways for you?
- How might you respond this week? How might your family do this together?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Take the challenging parts of your conversation to Jesus. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.