

You...Encourager or Critic?

By Harold & Bette Gillogly

We are commanded by the Holy Spirit to encourage one another and build each other up (1 Thess. 5:11). If you know the Lord, then, hopefully, you take this command pretty seriously. You try your best to encourage those who are DIScouraged. **But is that enough?** Is there more to this command than meets the eye?

Well, of course there is, or we wouldn't be asking, would we? What does it mean to live the life of an encourager? What does an encourager look like, anyway?

There's a man we admire tremendously, because if anyone could be called an Encourager, he could. His name is Joseph. He's a Levite from Cyprus. Ever run across him? Oh, you probably know him by his nick-name. All the Apostles call him Barnabas, which means "Son of Encouragement." He earned that nick name, too. Barnabas was a great Encourager. And if we take a closer look at his life, we should get a good idea of what an Encourager looks like.

FIRST of all, Barnabas knew, really knew, that **people were more important than things**. He didn't just say it and preach it...he lived it. In fact, that's the first thing we discover about him when he's introduced to us in Acts 4:32-37. There were believers in the young Jerusalem church who were needy, so Barnabas sells a field he owns and gives all the proceeds from it to the Apostles to give to those in need. Now, this might not seem like such a great sacrifice unless you consider how valuable even a little field was in that tiny strip of land called Judea. It would be like owning land in Japan or

Hong Kong. But Barnabas believed with all his heart that people in need were more important than the prestige of owning land.

Do we believe that? Do we hold our **possessions** tightly or with open hands? How about our **time**? Or our **plans**? Is your husband more important than getting the dishes done? Is your wife more important than the game? When we **put people first - - especially our mates - - our lives will be blest with harmony**.

Our lives are blessed when we put people first.

SECONDLY, Barnabas **believed in people**. We meet Barnabas again in Acts 9. Saul had just met Jesus on the Damascus road, and he was a changed man. Unfortunately, he couldn't convince the disciples in Jerusalem he was genuine. They were scared to death of him. After all, he was the man who hated Christians and had them locked up. But good old Barnabas believed in that changed man, and brought Saul (Paul) to the other disciples and convinced them to accept him with open arms.

Some days it just seems like the whole world is against us, doesn't it? These are the times when we especially need our mates to put their arms around us and tell us how much they love us, how proud they are of us, how glad they are to have married us. In order to GET affirmation like that, we have to GIVE affirmation like that. Make it a **habit** to tell your mate every day how valuable he or she is to

you. **Believe in your mate and your lives will be filled with love.**

The **THIRD** characteristic we see in Barnabas is that he **allowed people to grow out of needing him**. In Acts 11, word had just reached the Jerusalem church that some Greeks in Antioch had become believers, so Barnabas was sent to help them. When he arrived in Antioch, he was glad and encouraged them all. Sounds just like Barnabas, doesn't it? But that's not all. So many people in Antioch were brought to the Lord, that Barnabas rushed over to Tarsus to get Paul to come back and help him. That's right, in chapter 11, Paul was Barnabas' helper. But by chapter 13 (only 2 chapters later), Barnabas is mentioned as Paul's helper. From then on, they are always referred to as "Paul and Barnabas" not "Barnabas and Paul." But, you know what? Barnabas never seems to wince about the shift from being leader to becoming follower. He allowed Paul to grow out of complete dependence upon him. That's right...Barnabas wisely recognized this as growth.

We must untie the "apron strings."

Now, we all need to be needed, and that's all right. But, sometimes we cling to that need too hard. We become Super Mom or Super Dad, Super Wife or Super Husband, trying to prove HOW MUCH we are needed. We may say things like, Don't you *appreciate* all I do for you? It's dangerous to burn ourselves out trying to DO everything we think others expect us to DO. Better to BE what God

Encourager (cont')

expects us to BE. And He says *Godliness with contentment is great gain*. **If you allow your family to not need you as much as you think they should need you, your lives will be filled with peace.**

Barnabas displayed a **FOURTH** wonderful characteristic: **he allowed people to fail**. By the end of Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas had served the Lord together for several years. As they were getting ready for another missionary journey, Barnabas mentioned that it would be good to take John Mark with them. We can just see Paul's chagrin. "What? After he bailed out last time and went running home? No way!" But Barnabas, believer in people, could not agree with Paul. He wanted to give John Mark another chance. He allowed John Mark his failure, and was determined to help him to do it right this time.

"Failings" do not make people "Failures."

How about you, husband or wife? Do you allow the people you love to fail by refusing to take your advice? To fail by not showing you enough love or appreciation? To fail by doing something wrong because they wanted to do it themselves? It's hard to allow our

family to make mistakes. **But if you will, your lives will be filled with patience.**

The **LAST** characteristic of an Encourager, is an obvious one in Barnabas' life: **he did not have to see the end results**; he left those in God's hands. He didn't have to stay with Paul and make sure he turned out right. Barnabas knew that Paul was strong in the Word and could stand alone now. He knew that God could work in Paul's life without his being there to make sure He did.

And God **DID** continue to work in amazing ways in Paul's life. But most of what Paul learned about encouraging and caring for others, he learned by watching Barnabas model those qualities. Remember how Paul started out? He was passionate, excited, on fire, inspired ...he knew how to bulldoze but not how to handle with care. But through the years, he watched Barnabas build people up and really care for them, and experienced much of that caring for himself. As Paul watched, he changed. He became an encourager. In Romans chapter 16, written later in his life, he sends his love to 29 friends in the church at Rome, calling each by name. And in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, he says he feels like their Mommy, because he loved them so much and they had become so dear to him. Oh, yes, he could still be a

fire-ball, but Paul had learned to also be an Encourager.

Do you have to see **RESULTS** in your husband or wife? Do you spend a lot of your energy trying to make them change? Trying to convince them to be a better Christian? Well, you've got to realize by now that these tactics don't work. In fact, they usually backfire on you. But your mate may change by watching **YOU** model the qualities you wish he or she had.

Your mate may change because of your faithful and humble prayers. But he or she will never change because you push and criticize them into it. Can you leave your mate and your children in the hands of God? Can you celebrate the tiny victories of change and not require the gold medal? **If you can do this, then your lives will be filled with joy.**

Being an encourager is our choice.

As with so many other things in life, what this boils down to is a **CHOICE**. We must choose every day whether we're going to be an Encourager or a Critic. If your family could give you a nickname, what would it be?

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