

SERMON ON THE MOUNT #13 (MATTHEW 7:12):

¹²So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. Matthew 7:12. What does this mean in practice? The Bible casts a vision for it through what have been called the "one another's." They're called that because throughout the Bible and particularly the New Testament there are verses that use that phrase, "one another", as it lays out how we should flesh out the golden rule.

"Live in harmony with one another." Romans 12:16.

"Be patient, bearing with one another in love." Ephesians 4:2.

"Spur one another on toward love and good deeds." Hebrews 10:24.

"Accept one another." Romans 15:7.

"Stop passing judgment on one another." Romans 14:13.

"Be kind and compassionate to one another." Ephesians 4:32.

"Strengthen one another." Romans 14:19.

"Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another." Colossians 3:13.

"Offer hospitality to one another." I Peter 4:9.

And then, repeatedly, is this, first uttered by Jesus Himself: **"Love one another." John 13:34.**

I want to focus on two this morning, encouragement and service. ¹³ **But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. Hebrews 3:13.** What is encouragement? When you encourage someone you do just what the word says - you put courage in them to give them hope and confidence. You give them support. You give them help. You put spirit back into their lives, emotional gas in their tank. Let me give you a snapshot of that "one another" being fleshed out. It's the story of a man named Joseph, but people called him by another name. They literally called him Mr. Encouragement. We see this in the New Testament book of Acts. Acts is an interesting book – it chronicles the dynamics of the early church after the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It's called "Acts" because it records the acts or activities of the early followers of Jesus. Here's our first introduction to Joseph's life:

"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to

anyone as he had need. "Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement) sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet." Acts 4:32-37.

That passage contains one of the earliest glimpses into the life of the early Christian church. It was a time of great expectation and enthusiasm. The Holy Spirit had been poured out and was leading and active in the early church. People were responding to the message and there was rapid growth. However, it was also a time of great anxiety and great need. Enter Joseph. He established a tone for the entire community by selflessly, servant-heartedly, selling some land and giving the money to the church to help in its ministry. He was constantly doing things to encourage people. So much so that they nicknamed him Barnabas.

There is another great story about him just a few chapters later in Acts. There was a man by the name of Saul who had persecuted the church as an official representative of the leaders who had crucified Jesus. His goal had been the arrest, imprisonment and even murder of Christians. He was a nasty guy with a nasty reputation and greatly feared by all the followers of Jesus. In fact, when one of the earliest Christians, Stephen, was stoned to death for his beliefs, the Bible tells us that Saul was there applauding it.

Then, in an amazing supernatural move from God Saul became a follower of Christ. However, you can imagine that no one believed this story. They thought he was faking it to infiltrate the church: to find out where they met, how many there were and who the main leaders were. So here was Saul, a new Christian, with nowhere to go, no one to turn to, and distrusted by the church. Then Barnabas entered the picture. Here's what happened:

"When he [Saul] came to Jerusalem, 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..." Acts 9:26-28.

"News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. "Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 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." Acts 11:22-26.

Barnabas threw his weight and reputation and credibility behind Saul to get him accepted by the leaders of the church. He risked everything for someone else. He was the sole encourager to that

man's life. Now move a couple of more chapters forward in Acts and you see another scene from Barnabas' life. The news of Christ and his resurrection from the dead was spreading. People were becoming followers of Christ left and right, even in places where there was no church!

One of those places was a city named Antioch. The church at Jerusalem heard that large numbers of people in Antioch had become Christ-followers, and that God was doing remarkable things in their midst. Unfortunately, they lacked leadership. So, how did the church in Jerusalem respond?

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When there was a need to encourage a new group of believers, who did they send? Mr. Encouragement! What did Barnabas do? He decided to stay and devote an entire year of his life to them. Teaching and mentoring, leading, and investing. Serving in any way he could. And the impact of that service was so significant that it resulted in the people of the city calling that group of believers “Christians,” which means “little Christs.” A term that had never been used by people before then. We carry this name because of the gift of encouragement of Barnabas.

The church survived financially through the encouragement of Barnabas. The Apostle Paul became the greatest missionary who ever lived and who wrote most of the New Testament existed because of Barnabas. Do you see the power of encouraging one another? So, what can you give strategically that would encourage people? Who can you encourage? Who could you invest some time with? Who can you pray for, and then tell them you prayed for them today? Who can you pull aside and say something that will make them want to take another hill at the end of a long season?

Here's another “one another” to think about: “Serve one another in love.” ¹³ **You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. Galatians 5:13.**

Here's how John describes a very specific scene on the night before Jesus was betrayed and crucified; a night of final words and final lessons, to his closest followers. ⁴ **so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵ After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. John 13:4-5.** This story is probably familiar; the washing of the feet is part of our communion service.

Let me breathe some fresh life into a story that is well known. In Jesus' day, they didn't have paved roads. The roads were mostly dirt, and people didn't wear shoes like we do, but went barefoot, or occasionally wore what we would call sandals. Not only that, but the major form of transportation on these roads, if you weren't walking, was by donkey or camel. The roads were also used to move groups of cattle or sheep.

You had dirt, manure, and who knows what else wherever you walked. If it rained, it would be a muddy, filthy mess. So, here's what people would do. Whenever you go into an inn, or to a friend's house for a meal or party, there would be someone at the door. Usually, a paid servant who had a basin of water and a towel, and they would wash and then dry your feet. However, because people's feet would be so nasty, it was considered one of the lowest jobs you could possibly have. So here Jesus was with his disciples, gathered for the Passover feast, but there was no one at the door to wash feet.

So, there they all sat around the table, with proud hearts and dirty feet. They were willing to sit there as a group with all that filth on their feet rather than serve one another in a way they deemed beneath them. And Jesus walks in, and sees them all there, and then sits down and doesn't say a word. Then he taught them one of the greatest lessons about being his followers. **⁴ so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵ After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. John 13:4-5.**

¹² When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. ¹³ "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. John 13: 12-15.

When you are practicing this "one another," you're walking through life with a towel over your arm and a basin of water. You're not thinking about being served, but who you can serve.