

Sermon, September 19, 2021

Isaiah 41:8-10; Acts 14:35-41

“Shaped by Community: Everyone Needs a Barnabas”

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Have you ever listened to a piece of music and even if it's not a great song there is something about the lyric, a phrase that captures your imagination? I heard one the other day, and I didn't take time, I confess, to research the song. But the phrase was something to the effect *some of the greatest times in this person's life happened when he was bored.*

What he meant by that was some of the greatest memories he had with his family, friends, or even by himself, were things that came out of being bored and looking for something to do. The games played and laughter on a rainy afternoon. The adventures he and his friends had because they got bored, rode bikes, found each other, and off they went. It's a celebration of the small precious moments in life that become treasured moments and memories.

It made me wonder what ever happened to being bored? I think we've lost that gift. We live in a world that depends on constant stimulation, constant assault on our senses. Entertainment and doing things has

become less a goal for us and more the white noise of our lives. We've become afraid of being bored, and in doing so are perhaps losing some great memories.

As a small child who had some hyperactive tendencies, I got bored all the time. And when I did, all of the kids in the neighborhood suffering from the same ennui that afflicted me would go looking for something to do. We inevitably found ourselves in the small woods behind the house across the street from my house. It wasn't a very big woods, but it was large enough for us to explore, play games, yet not get lost.

It had a nice creek that ran through it, as well. One day, we decided to take some sticks and reroute the small creek. The intent was to watch it flow around the stick. We noticed that the more sticks we added, the more it was rerouted, and the water began to pool.

Now, what happens next, I will, until my dying day, blame on our mothers, who decided at the most inopportune time it was lunch time and we all had to come and eat. Had they not moved us from our task, we would have eventually gotten bored, taken the stick away, and done something else. What happened was that by the time we went home, had lunch, played with our toys, and it was almost time for the cartoons to come on, we forgot.

We forgot until our neighbor came out to complain that someone had dammed up the creek and it was now overflowing into the yards around him. He was apparently more concerned about the state of his lawn than to marvel at the constructive genius of the children in his neighborhood.

It was quickly taken down, and no, we never confessed it was us. We were bored, we weren't stupid. But I never forgot how little it took to divert that stream. It only took a few sticks to completely reroute the stream into a different direction. Just a few sticks put into a certain spot, and everything changed.

In many ways, our lives are like that stream. We may have a general idea of the direction we wish to go in life. But what will make the difference are the things that reroute our lives, that send our stream into a different direction. And once our lives are rerouted, the direction of our lives can become very different.

Rev. Shane Bishop wrote this the other day. He said "I want to urge you smile more to say thank you and you're welcome. To open doors for people around you". He said, "I know those acts of consideration and kindness seem incredibly simplistic. But it's not like what we are doing is working". There is some great wisdom here. Sometimes small acts of kindness and consideration, like those sticks in the creek, can reroute someone's entire life.

Who has shaped and helped reroute your life? We are in our third week of messages in our series Shaped by Community. Our premise is that we are shaped by the communities in which we find ourselves, and we ought to intentionally put ourselves in those communities that can shape us into Christ-like individuals.

So, let me ask the question again, *who is helping to reroute and shape the direction of your life?* Or put another way, *who are the people that have the greatest impact, or the greatest influence over the direction of your life and character?*

It seems to me that those people, those sticks in the stream, come in two separate categories. We are the most influenced in life by two different types of individuals. Those who discourage us, and those that encourage us. The people in your life who will have the greatest influence over who you become, who you are, are those who discourage you and those who encourage you.

When we surround ourselves with people who tear us down, who tells all the things we have done wrong, all that we can't accomplish, it can blind us to the eternal truth that we have been created by God for a great purpose. You can take someone with the greatest self-esteem, and over time, if all they ever have around them are people who tear them down, they will eventually find their spirits diminished.

And you can take someone who has little gifts, little natural talent, but give them a few people in their lives who believe in them, who see potential in them, who build them up, and those people will have their lives completely rerouted. The only difference is who influences their stream.

Look to our Scripture from the book of Acts. There is a debate between Barnabus and Paul over John Mark. A young man who went on a mission trip with Paul and Barnabus before. He was a bit of a momma's boy and gets homesick, leaves, abandons them midway on their mission. When he wants to come along again, Paul, understandably, says *no*. All he can see is the person John Mark was and the mistakes he had made. Barnabus wants to take him along. Why, because he sees not who John Mark was but who he could become. Two sticks, if you will, with two very different routes. All Paul had to offer was discouragement. Barnabus offered encouragement. Thankfully John Mark is routed by Barnabus' faith and eventually writes the first Gospel, the Gospel of Mark.

Friends, everybody needs a Barnabus. Everybody needs someone who believes in them. SO, as we asked last week, *who are the Paul's in your life?* I'm curious as to who's your Barnabus? Who are the people in your life who see what you can be? Who influences your life? Are you surrounded by people who tear you down or build you up? If you have some Barnabus' in your life, thank God for them. If you don't, ask God to raise up some encouragers in your life.

If everyone needs a Barnabus, whose Barnabus are you? Every day, people cross your path, the elderly, the young, spouses, friends, significant others. Strangers and co-workers. As you interact with them, do you build them up or do you spend more time tearing them down? You may be the influence that can change someone's life for good or for bad. When you go to bed at night, ask yourself which direction did I send people today? Did I build them up or tear them down? If you go back to our Scripture in Acts, over

and over again Luke writes about people who daily encouraged and strengthened others. Can we claim that our lives ought to be any different?

Here's something I've been trying to do lately. Because I've been convicted by this, as well. Try this, in fact, write it down, put it where you can see it every day. If I can't build up, then shut up. If I can't build up, then shut up. You'd be amazed, in conversations, social media, whatever, but I'll begin to comment and then erase it all because I asked myself does this build up? No? Then shut up. If you do this, you'll be amazed at how much better your relationships with other people will be. You'll be surprised at how building others up can redirect their day, even their lives. And you'll be surprised at how much better you feel. People have enough sticks in their lives tearing them down. They need someone to build them up. Everyone needs a Barnabus. whose Barnabus are you? Amen.