



The Greatest Leader You've Never Heard Of

WEEK 4



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Sermon Manuscripts

Sermon 4: The Greatest Leader You've Never Heard Of

Selected Scriptures

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Introduction

Let's talk about Michael Jordan, the greatest of all time. You probably know that for the first six years of his career, he only won personal awards and achievements. He won scoring titles and defensive player of the year awards, but he never won a championship.

It wasn't until his 7th year in the NBA that things changed. And what changed was the coach. He got Phil Jackson as his head coach. And Phil Jackson put in a new offense and told the most gifted scorer in NBA history to stop shooting so much. Jordan bought into Phil's system, and they started winning and really didn't stop as long as Jordan was there.

The point is: It doesn't really matter how gifted you are personally. You can't do it by yourself. Jordan needed Scottie Pippen and Phil Jackson. And we need people around us to help us and elevate us.

This is the way God designed it. God designed both men and women to be leaders, but he didn't design us to lead the way the world thinks leadership should be.

Do you remember the five things Christian leadership is not that we looked at a couple of weeks ago? Leadership is not about position. You can make a massive impact and hold no formal position of authority. You don't have to have a title. You don't have to have a corner office. You can shape the future of your home, church, and community and zero authority to make people do what you want them to do. It's not about position.

Leadership is not about personality. You don't have to have a big gregarious personality. You don't have to be the one that lights up the room when you walk in. You don't have to be a

social butterfly and be able to have a conversation with everyone in the world. God designed you just the way you are, and he designed you to lead just the way you are.

Leadership is not about popularity. If you want to lead because you want people to like you, then you are going to need to look in a different direction. I've said this before, and I'll say it again. There are two jobs that everyone else in the world knows how to do better than you: football coach and pastor. If the team loses, the coach is an idiot. He doesn't know what he's doing.

Everyone is a better coach, and everyone is a better pastor. I was talking with a friend of mine the other day, and a couple of people brought him a list of things he was doing wrong. These two people were speaking for "they." "They said this. They said that." But he said that there were 30 things on the list, and the church only runs about 20.

Listen, it's always that way with leadership. Most of the time, you are not popular. Most of the time, great leaders feel alone. And all of the time, people talk about you and second-guess every decision you make. Leadership has nothing to do with popularity.

Leadership has nothing to do with power. It's true that people will give great leaders power, but the reason followers will gladly give leaders power is because the leader has never abused that power. Leadership is not about controlling people. It's not about using people. Leadership is empowering people to become what God designed them to be.

Leadership is not private. Great leadership is not about the leader's personal achievements and accolades. There are people who have achieved a lot personally by manipulating and controlling others, but their impact doesn't last. The minute they're gone, everything they did fades.

I want to have an impact that outlives me. I want to see that in my kids. I want my boys to grow up to be godly men who raise godly sons and daughters. I want to see them make their own good decisions beyond my control. I want to see them be far more successful than I am. If I can teach them now, then my impact will outlive me. I want that in my home.

I also want to see that in my church. I don't want to pastor a church built on my personal charisma. I want to pastor a church that outlives me and makes a difference for the kingdom of God long after I'm gone.

And that's what Christian leadership is. Christian leadership is the ministry of coming alongside someone and elevating them. If you only hear one thing I say, let it be that. Christian leadership is the ministry of coming alongside someone and elevating them. We said that Christian leadership is influencing people for the glory of God. Christian leadership is empowering people to live out their call to the best of their ability.

The only way to measure that, the only way to measure the effectiveness of leadership is by looking at the breadth of its influence. Are you able to invest in people and influence people for the glory of God and see that influence extend beyond them and make a larger impact? That's the measure of Christian leadership.

The Greatest Leader You've Never Heard Of

Now, with that in mind, I want to introduce you to the greatest leader you've never heard of, or at least to someone you never think of as a leader. And to do that, I'm going to ask you a question. Other than Jesus, who do you think the greatest leader in the Bible is? Think about that. And remember, we're thinking about the breadth of someone's influence as an indicator. Who do you think it is? Who do you think has the widest influence in the Bible not named Jesus?

Immediately, our minds go to someone like Paul. Certainly, Paul has a profound impact on us. There's no doubt about Paul. His impact is massive. But I don't think the most influential leader in the Bible not named Jesus is Paul. A lot of people will say it's Peter. I don't think it's Peter as great as Peter is. I don't even think it's someone like King David. And certainly, David was a great leader. I'm not trying to diminish what God did with any of those guys.

But, if we are talking about measuring Christian leadership by the breadth of someone's influence to help others see the glory of God, then who do you think that person is? Who's impact is the most felt, while at the same time being the most unseen?

Give me that graphic. Let's see if this helps. Here is one man. This man was influential in the growth of one of the largest churches in the world in the Book of Acts. It was the church in Antioch. Antioch was one of the largest cities in the ancient world, and it sat at a strategic intersection between Egypt, Asia Minor, Greece, Italy, and Mesopotamia. The city was strategic, and the church was strategic. This man was a leader in that church.

Then, this man was sent out by that church and was a catalyst for a church-planting movement. He either directly or indirectly accounts for at least 14 church plants, probably more.

Then, because he invested in and elevated the Apostle Paul, we get Timothy, Titus, Epaphroditus, Silas, Priscilla, Aquilla, and others. Additionally, from Paul, we get 25.6% of the New Testament.

Beyond Paul, he redeemed John Mark. Mark, of course, wrote the Gospel of Mark, which heavily influenced Matthew and Luke. So, through his investment in Mark, we get 34.4% of the New Testament. So, through the direct influence of one man, not only do we get all of these churches and men who impacted millions, but we also get 60% of the New Testament.

The breadth of this man's influence is incredible. And yet, we never think of him as a leader. The man is Barnabas. And this morning, we're going to look at his story. It's the story of

a legend-making leader. It's the story of a man who gets no accolades, no awards, no gifts, no glory, and yet, none of us would be here 2000 years later without him.

Five Traits of a Legend-Making Leader

So, grab your Bibles and turn with me to Acts chapter 4, and let's meet him. We're going to trace Barnabas's story through the book of Acts, so be prepared to turn with me. But we're going to start at the beginning, and we're going to see 5 things about legend-making leaders. Read with me beginning in Acts 4:32-36.

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.³³ And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.³⁴ There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold³⁵ and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.³⁶ Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus,³⁷ sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Legend-Making Leaders are People-Lovers

Now, the first thing we need to see here is that legend-making leaders are people-lovers. Legend-making leaders love people. They don't love on people. That will get you put on a list, but they have a heart for people. They care for people. They want to see other people blessed. The introduction to Barnabas here in Acts 4 reveals that to us about him.

This is early on in the life of the church. Pentecost happens in Acts 2. By Acts 4, the church has grown exponentially. The Lord was multiplying the church and there was a sweet spirit of unity. It says in verse 32 that there was, "One heart and one soul." They were all together.

It also says, "They had everything in common." Now, that does not refer to communism. The Greek word for "common" is the root word for Koinonia.¹ It means fellowship, communion, partners, and partakers. This is the same relationship believers have with the Lord. All the resources of God are at the disposal of the child of God.²

1. G. Campbell Morgan, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1924), 139.

2. Ibid.

That's how it was in the early church. Everyone sacrificially gave so that everyone else could be blessed. When everyone did that, everyone had all of their needs met.

A man named Joseph personifies those ideals. Because he personifies what it means to sacrificially love others, he gets a nickname: Barnabas.

I don't know what it was like where you grew up, but where I grew up, everyone got a nickname. Some of those nicknames lasted through High School, and some of those nicknames carry on 40, 50, or 60 years later.

There are people I grew up with and I don't know their real names. There is one guy who is 3 or 4 years older than me. His name is Gator. I have never known him by another name. I don't know how he got that nickname, but that's his name. There is another guy about the same age whose name is Booger. How would you like to be called Booger your whole life? That's an unfortunate one.

Josiah is on the middle school football team. He's got a nickname now. They call him Taco. It's not because we're Hispanic. He wore a pair of tall socks to practice that had tacos on them. So, that's his name now. We'll see how long that lasts.

Joseph gets the nickname Barnabas, which means son of encouragement. He was so synonymous with encouraging people that everyone just started calling him the encourager. And that's why I call him the greatest leader you've never heard of. If we were to have played a game of Bible trivia before the service, very few people would have known Barnabas' real name.

Take a look at some of these pictures on the screen. Who is this guy? That's not Bono. That's Paul Hewson. He took his name from a hearing aid shop. That's a true story.

Here's another one. Who is this guy? That's not Randy Savage. That's Randy Poffo. Doesn't have the same ring to it, does it?

But listen, Bono and the Macho Man are legends, and we know them for what they do. Barnabas was a legendary encourager. In fact, he was so legendary, that's all we know him by. We know him simply as the encourager.

That's the personification of the spirit in the early church. They loved each other. They sacrificially served each other. They were constantly looking for ways to bless and elevate each other. And Barnabas becomes known for this.

Which is a terrifying thought all by itself. What if people only called you by what you were best known for? Some names would be funny. I know some pastors I would call Donuts McGee because they're so large. Some would be funny.

Others would be harsh. My pastor used to say this from the pulpit. He would call women that like to gossip, “Sister Bucket Mouth.” Imagine carrying that one around for the rest of your life.

But this is a really good exercise. Spend some time thinking about this. Ask your kids. Ask your family. Ask your church. Don’t let them know what you’re doing, but ask them, “Fill in the blank: I spend most of my time blank.” That will give you a pretty good view of your actual priorities.

Barnabas was defined as an encourager. Barnabas loved people. He sold a field which belonged to him, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet." Why did he do this? Verse 34 says that it was to meet the needs of the poor in the Christian community.

Legend-making leaders do this. This is their default position. They do not try to achieve a position. They are not interested in power. They are not concerned with personal accolades. They elevate people. Legend-making leaders stoop down to the lowest and elevate the highest.

Legend-Making Leaders are Risk-Takers

And you see that in the second point. Flip with me to Acts 9. In Acts 9, we see Barnabas invest in a man named Saul, the man who would become the Apostle Paul. And we know Paul’s backstory. He was a vicious man. He persecuted Christians. He arrested Christians. And he murdered Christians. Then Jesus showed up.

That’s really the story of all of us. We were all enemies of Christ, but then Jesus showed up and changed our hearts. That’s what Jesus does for Paul. He changes his heart. But for Jesus to use him, he’s got to change the hearts of everyone else, too.

The early church is terrified of Saul. You would be, too. Everyone is suspicious of him. You would be, too. We are quick to forgive in word only, and most of the time we never forget. We hold minor slights people have perpetrated on us forever. If Saul were instrumental in the murder of your friend Stephen, you probably wouldn’t be willing to let that go. But God has big plans for Saul.

God’s solution to his Saul problem is Barnabas. And so, your second point is this: Legend-making leaders are risk-takers. Look at 9:26-27.

And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

I believe there was only one person in the world willing to take a chance on Saul. Barnabas loved people, and he was willing to take a risk on this former Pharisee, so he took him under his wing. That's the emphasis behind the first part of verse 27.³ "Barnabas took him and brought him."

Barnabas wasn't reckless with Saul. We have to be careful here. You can't elevate people without evidence that the Lord is at work in their life. But Barnabas steps in and says, "Look, this man saw Jesus, and this man has been preaching about Jesus at great risk to his own life. The Hellenists are trying to kill him." So, Barnabas was willing to take a calculated risk on Saul. And because he did, the church accepted him, his ministry flourished, and God used him to spread the gospel further and wider than anyone in the history of the world not named Jesus.

And this isn't the only time Barnabas takes a chance on Paul. Barnabas takes a step here in Acts 9. Then, he watched as Paul grew. When he sees further evidence of Paul's growth, Barnabas takes another chance on him.

The church in Antioch was commissioning Barnabas to be a missionary. He was going to go on the first missionary journey, travel around, and plant churches. Faced with this challenge, Barnabas says, "Go get me, Saul."

Barnabas is the one who brought Saul into the church. Barnabas was instrumental in Saul's growth and development. Without Barnabas, Saul would not have been on those missionary journeys.

Listen, if you're going to be a legend-making leader, you're going to have to take calculated risks with people. You're going to have to give people the opportunity to grow and be successful. Sometimes, that means they'll fail you. And that's okay. You have to be intentional to see the potential in people and be willing to give them a shot, and be willing to give them another chance, even if they failed previously.

Nick Saban understood this. Lane Kiffin was fired by the Raiders and left Tennessee on fire, literally and figuratively. They were burning mattresses on campus when he quit Tennessee after a year. Kiffin went to USC and was fired from there at 3 A.M. on an airport runway. But Saban gave him a shot. He won 2 national championships for him. Now, he's built a Top 10 program at Ole Miss.

Saban did the same thing for Steve Sarkisian. He was an alcoholic who showed up to practices drunk at USC. But Saban took a risk on him. Sark has built a Top 4 program at Texas.

3. Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 369.

Legend-making leaders are always looking for the best in people. They are always looking for potential. And they're always willing to take calculated risks with people. Don't be quick to dismiss a vessel God may use. Look for ways to elevate them, grow them, and invest in them, even if they've failed in the past.

Legend-Making Leaders are Grace-Revealers

Number three, legend-making leaders are grace-revealers. Not only do they take risks, they are quick to show grace. Flip with me to Acts 11 and let's look at verse 19-25.

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. ²⁰ But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. ²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. ²² The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³ When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, ²⁴ for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. ²⁵ So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶ and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

So, God used Saul as the persecutor to scatter the church, and the Lord was with them as they were scattered. As a result, the church in Antioch was born. And that church grew. When the Apostles in Jerusalem heard about it, they dispatched Barnabas. And I love verse 23. "When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad." This is the mark of a legend-making leader. They are happy to show grace.

Do you know what grace is? I've done this with the boys since they were little bitty. When one of them would do something stupid and get in trouble, I'd sit down and talk with them. And I would say, "Tell me what you did." And they would tell me. Then I would say, "What do you think the punishment should be?" And they would drop their little heads and say, "A whipping." Then, whenever I could, I would ask, "Can you tell me what grace is?" And they would look up at me when they were 3 or 4 years old and say, "Grace is getting what you don't deserve." Then, I would look at them and say, "Can Daddy show you grace?"

Listen, we all deserve judgment and punishment from God. We all, like sheep, have gone astray. But God shows us grace in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Legend-making leaders are quick to show grace. I'm not sure why we aren't.

Most of the time, we're happy when people get what they deserve. Aren't we? I want grace for me. I want justice for you. We want people to get what they've got coming to them. I've said this before, but I've got a list of funerals I'm excited to attend. I'm showing up in a Hawaiian shirt. I'm here for the party.

Legend-making leaders are grace-revealers. They want people to succeed. They want people to be successful. And they're glad when they do.

Barnabas could have been bitter. Saul wreaked havoc on the church. No doubt, Saul's persecution had wreaked havoc on the lives of people that Barnabas loved, but he was glad for the grace of God in it. And so, he sees it and travels to Tarsus to look for Saul.

Saul had gone home. He was from Tarsus. I guarantee he was regretful of his actions that caused so much harm. And he's there until Barnabas shows up looking for him.

Barnabas find him and brings him to Antioch to show him all the good God had done through his wicked actions. This is the perfect illustration of "What you meant for evil, God meant for good."

Barnabas tells him, "God used you then, Saul, and he'll use you now." And they stayed there for a year and taught "a great many people." But I love the last sentence of verse 26. "And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians."

Who do you think was directly responsible for that? The term Christian refers to people who imitate Jesus. There are various theories about the etymology of the label, but whatever theory you subscribe to, it must be said that they spoke of Christ, sang of Christ, and their lives looked like Christ.⁴ Barnabas taught people to be imitators of Christ to the degree in which he is directly or indirectly responsible for the nickname that every believer since then has carried. Talk about influence!

When we were at our last church, a young family started coming to church. They had two little girls. At that time, the little girls were probably 3 years old, and they had been to Mission Friends with Alisha a couple of times on Wednesday nights. On a Wednesday evening, their mom and dad came in and asked the girls if they wanted to stay with them. And the girls said, "We want to go to Jesus's class."

Their parents were confused and said, "What do you mean?" And they pointed at Alisha standing out in the hall and said, "We want to go to Jesus's class!" They didn't know or couldn't pronounce Alisha's name, but they knew she talked about Jesus.

4. Morgan, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 288.

It's because of Barnabas, and the amazing grace he showed that we're called Christians. You don't have to know his name, but you do need to know he looked like Jesus. Listen, Legend-making leaders are grace-revealers.

Legend-Making Leaders are Prominence-Pushers

Number 4, Legend-making leaders are prominence-pushers. They are not interested in their own glory. This is the most difficult thing for us to accept. We can want people to be successful, but we don't really want them to be more successful than us.

I saw the most boomer thing I've ever seen the other day. There's an older couple that has lived in the same house since before I was born. They live just a few houses down from us. Well, the house next to them came up for sale, so they bought it for their daughter. That's awesome. That's very kind and generous, but when their daughter started to move into it, her parents decided that her house was slightly better than their house, so they moved next door and gave their daughter the other house.

They literally lived a happy life for 40 or 50 years in that house. They did a great thing for their daughter. But the minute they realized she was going to have something slightly nicer than them, they said, "Oh, we can't have that." That's what I mean when I say we can want people to be successful but not more successful than us.

We don't see this with Barnabas. Barnabas could have been a big deal in his own right in Antioch. The church was growing. Converts were everywhere. Because of his ministry, the church was so healthy that it became synonymous with imitators of Jesus.

Barnabas could have settled down in his own position of prominence as the pastor of the largest church in the area. He would have gotten all the accolades. He would have been the keynote speaker on the Christian conference circuit. He could have written and published books. Barnabas could have made a name for himself. Instead, he goes and finds a more dynamic preacher than he was. He goes and finds Paul.

I can't even envision a circumstance where a pastor today of a large growing church would say, "I'm an okay preacher. But I think we can do better. I'm going to go and recruit someone even better than me and bring them on staff and push them out front." We're so far removed from that that I can't even wrap my brain around it. That's outlandish. We don't want to be overshadowed in any way, but not Barnabas.

Look at verses 25 and 26 again. "So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church, and taught a large company of people."

With Barnabas's investment in Paul's life here, he secured his secondary status in church history forever. Barnabas' shadow on history is almost completely obliterated by the blinding light of Paul's star. God had a different role for Paul that he did not design Barnabas for. Barnabas gladly shoved Paul into this role, even though it would ultimately mean that Barnabas gets very few accolades and very few acknowledgments. But what he does get is influence

Flip with me to Acts 13. Let's track the story. In Acts 13, the Holy Spirit sets Barnabas and Paul aside for a missionary journey. Up until this point, Barnabas has always been named first, followed by Saul. Barnabas is the leader.

When they get to the island of Cyprus, the proconsul invites the men to speak. Barnabas is still first. He is in the position of prominence. But when Elymas the magician tries to turn him away from the faith, Paul is the one who comes to the forefront.

Look at verse 9. "But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him ¹⁰ and said, "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?"

Now, if we're being honest, that's probably not the route that Barnabas would have taken. I have a hard time imagining Barnabas calling someone a son of the devil, the enemy of righteousness, full of deceit and villainy. It doesn't seem to me that's in keeping with Barnabas's nature. But it very much is in Paul's nature.

It's a lot like Alisha and me. She is very much a Barnabas. She's very kind. She's very graceful. She sacrifices to elevate everyone around her. We've got a list of people we're excited to meet when we get to Heaven. This is true. She wants to go hang out with Job. His friends were mean to him. She wants to hang out with him. And she wants to hang out with Barnabas.

I can't wait to meet the Apostle Paul. I love the Apostle Paul. He's my hero. Also, sometimes he's not very nice. But we're never called to be nice. Nice isn't a fruit of the spirit. In our text, he was full of the spirit and God called him to say something Barnabas could have never said.

But this is the moment that Barnabas fades into the background. For the rest of their time together, Barnabas has a consistent strategy. He is going to keep pushing this dynamic young preacher out front at the expense of his own glory and his own brand. Both men pay a price. Paul was beaten, stoned, imprisoned, and eventually executed. Barnabas pays the price by fading into obscurity. But while he may be obscure here, Barnabas is a legend-maker in heaven. Legend-making leaders are prominence-pushers.

Legend-Making Leaders are Failure-Redeemers

Finally, legend-making leaders are failure redeemers. Flip with me to Acts 15 and let's look at verses 36-40.

And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are."³⁷ Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark.³⁸ But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.³⁹ And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus,⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.⁴¹ And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

After all their success together, God designed that the band had to break up so that both men could elevate others. Both Paul and Barnabas respond to an issue that's true to their nature. You see, John Mark started out on a missionary journey with them. Paul and Barnabas needed him, but he quit on them. In the middle of the trip, John Mark abandoned them and went back home.

Barnabas, true to his nature, is always looking for a way to show grace. As Paul and Barnabas are getting ready to go on another trip, Barnabas says, "Hey, let's give John Mark another shot." Paul, true to his nature, isn't willing to trust Mark with that level of responsibility until he earns it back.

Now, I have to be really careful because Alisha and I have an ongoing fight over this text at my house. It's caused some dissension in my marriage over the years. She's adamant that Barnabas was right to give Mark another shot. I'm adamant that Paul was right because I get Paul. I mean, why would you want to trust this joker again? He got homesick and went back home to momma. I get it. I wouldn't want him with me either.

So, Paul and Barnabas have this sharp disagreement over Mark, and they have to separate. And I can hear Barnabas's argument. He says, "Paul, you murdered Christians! I did this for you!" And I can hear Paul's argument.

Now, I think John Mark was in the Garden of Gethsemane. Mark includes a note in his Gospel about a young man who runs away from the Romans naked. I think that's John Mark. So, I can hear Paul. "He's a coward. He abandoned Jesus! He abandoned me and you! I'm not putting him in the position to fail again."

Both men are stuck. Barnabas isn't going to leave without him, and Paul isn't going to leave with him. So, they separate.

Now, we have to be careful not to take this too far. You can become an enabler. I know one of the sweetest ladies who has ever lived. She had a bunch of kids. All of them ended up in prison because she enabled their bad behavior. So, we have to be careful. But if you're going to err with someone, err on the side of grace.

Somehow, in the power of the Holy Spirit, Barnabas manages to redeem Mark. Mark traveled with Peter. Mark wrote the first of the four Gospels. Barnabas even redeemed Mark in the eyes of Paul.

Paul writes in 2 Timothy 4:11, "Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry." Paul, in prison, alone, and waiting to be executed, asks for Mark to come to him. Why? Paul says that Mark is "Useful to me in my ministry."

Friends, that is a legend-making leader. They are failure-redeemers. They always look for the best in people. And given the opportunity, they always elevate them. Is that not exactly what Jesus does for us? He redeemed our failures and made it possible for us to have a relationship with him.

Conclusion

Barnabas is absolutely the greatest leader you've never heard of. The influence he has over church history, from the first church planting movement to the very word of what we're called, Barnabas's fingerprints are all over it. Without Barnabas, 60% of the New Testament wouldn't exist. His influence is profound, and yet, we rarely acknowledge him as anything more than a secondary Bible character. Barnabas is a treasure that we should cherish because we can do everything he did.

We can't be the Apostle Paul. We can't be the Apostle Peter preaching that great sermon in Acts 2. But we can all be like Barnabas. Everyone in this room can be people-lovers, risk-takers, grace-revealers, prominence-pushers, and failure-redeemers for the glory of God. We can do that.

Now, let me introduce you to someone who has been a Barnabas in my life. Put that first picture on the screen. This picture was taken about 16 years ago. I'm there in that picture. I'm the tall guy in the back.

This picture was taken at a celebration of a lady named Jane Hodges. She taught Sunday school at my home church for over 55 years. This picture was taken at a fellowship to commemorate her retirement as a Sunday school teacher. During the fellowship meal, someone decided to get a picture of everyone at church that Sunday who had Mrs. Jane as a Sunday school teacher over the years. Obviously, there are many more people who she ministered to over the years, but this is the group that was at church that day.

Now, beyond the visual of it, here's why that picture is important to me. I would not be here without her. We had a group of 12 or 14 boys in my age group when I was growing up. And I'll admit we were awful. I'll own that. In fact, we were so awful growing up that whenever we would promote from one age group to the next in Sunday School, the Sunday school teachers would quit. That's true. Nobody wanted us. Nobody loved us except Mrs. Jane and another lady named Mrs. Mary Jo Miller. So, they took us when we were young and followed us all the way up through the years. They loved us. They invested in us. Do you know what Mrs. Jane told my mother about why she did that? She said, "I'm going to make godly young men out of them."

I was looking at that picture yesterday and marveling at Mrs. Jane's influence over the years. In this picture, you have school teachers, bank tellers, accountants, and nurses. All of them love Jesus and serve him in different ways in the church. She's produced other Sunday school teachers, small group leaders, deacons, and pastors.

Mrs. Jane is the epitome of a Christian leader. She never benefited personally from it, was never paid a salary, and was never in a position of authority. But everyone in that picture would pick up the phone and do anything for Mrs. Jane. She's a legend-making leader. And, at the end of the day, that's what she's most proud of.

When I finished studying for this sermon, I went to see Mrs. Jane. She turned 100 years old about a month ago. She lives in the assisted living in Waynesboro. So, after spending so much time with Barnabas, I just wanted to go hug her and tell her that I loved her and that I appreciated all that she had done for me.

When I walked into her room, this was hanging on her wall. Give me that next picture. That's the banner the church made for her over 16 years ago. It's hanging on the wall of her room in the assisted living place. I had no idea it was there.

She's 100 years old. She's not in good health. I wouldn't think it would be very long before the Lord calls her home. And the thing she's most proud of is all the lives she touched over the years. That's the heart of a leader.

Where's your heart? You can be that for someone. You can be their Barnabas. When you commit to leading like Barnabas, there's no ceiling on what God can do with your impact and influence.