

And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea, sent him off to Tarsus. So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up.

[4 : 01] And they were walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit. And the church multiplied. This is God's word.

Pray with me and for me as we ask God, as we sincerely ask God to speak to us tonight. Lord, thank you for the time of worship that we've had through the singing of these songs.

What a friend we have in Jesus. Jesus, friend of sinners. Lord, how we can lay all of our cares and burdens down at your feet because you care about us.

You care about our lives. And so I pray that in this moment, by your spirit, you would lift us up, encourage us, speak to us.

May this be a moment that we encounter you through your word. And I pray this for the glory of Jesus only. And I ask it in his name. And God's people said, amen.

[5 : 14] You can be seated. They can say all they want. We're just here to play ball. It's just a bunch of crackpots still fighting the Civil War.

Well, hell, we'd have won that son of a gun if the cornstalks would have held out. We just ran out of ammunition. Better luck next time, PeeWee. Ain't gonna be a next time, Jackie.

All we got is right here. Thank you, Jackie. What are you thanking me for? I got family up there from Louisville.

I need them to know. I need them to know who I am. Hey, number one.

You playing ball or socializing? Playing ball, huh? Playing ball. I don't know if he's getting to you.

Playing ball. Maybe tomorrow we'll all wear 42.

[6 : 19] That way they won't tell us apart. That exchange happened, but not exactly the way everyone's been told.

The way the story is told, as you just saw there, it was May 13, 1947. The Brooklyn Dodgers are in Cincinnati for a baseball game. Jackie Robinson, the first African-American baseball player who is being booed and heckled and criticized in every stadium and town he goes into.

And then shortstop PeeWee Reese comes over, a native of Louisville, Kentucky, and puts his arm around Jackie as a sign of friendship and support.

In fact, there's even a statue of this very event at MCU Park at Coney Island. Now, that version of the story was told by Red Barber in a documentary entitled Baseball.

But shortly after that documentary, Barber stopped telling that story because there wasn't any evidence of that one specifically. No one wrote about it in the newspapers.

[7 : 32] It wasn't mentioned in the 1948 biography about Jackie. It wasn't mentioned in the 1950 movie about his life. But while there's no evidence of the event in Cincinnati happening, it doesn't mean that an event similar to that didn't happen.

Years later, in Robinson's autobiography where he tells his own story entitled I Never Had It Made, he describes an event that took place not in Cincinnati but in Boston in 1948.

Here's what he says, quote, In Boston, during a period when the heckling pressure seemed unbearable, some of the players began to heckle Reese. They were writing him about being a southerner and playing ball with a black man.

PeeWee didn't answer. Without a glance in their direction, he left his position and walked over to me. He put his hand on my shoulder and began talking to me.

His words weren't important. I don't even remember what he said. It was the gesture of friendship and support that counted.

[8 : 49] And as he stood talking with me with a friendly arm around my shoulder, he was saying loud and clear, Yell! Heckle!

Do what you want! We came here to play baseball. And then Robinson describes another event similar to this that happened in 1949.

Again, he continues to say, quote, I'll never forget the day when a few loudmouthed guys on the other team began to take off on PeeWee. They were shouting at him viciously because he was playing on a team with me.

Mind you, they were not yelling at me. I suppose they didn't have the nerve to do that. But they were calling him some very vile names. And everyone bounced off PeeWee and hit me like a machine gun.

And PeeWee sensed my hopelessness and came over and stood beside me. He didn't say a word. He just looked over at the chaps who were yelling at him and stared.

[9 : 54] Slowly the jabs died down like when you kill a snake an inch at a time. And then there was nothing but quiet.

It was wonderful the way this little guy did it. And I'll never forget it.

You see, Faith Family, while that exchange between Robinson and PeeWee didn't happen exactly the way you see it in the movie, it did happen. And on multiple occasions.

And what is it about that story? What is it about that image that resonates with us? It grips me every time I watch the scene. It grips me. It grips me emotionally.

Why is that? Well, for many reasons. But one of the reasons it does that is because it's a beautiful picture of friendship, of support, of brotherhood, of out-of-the-ordinary kindness when someone is being persecuted and slandered.

[10 : 58] It's a picture not of just being a great teammate, but being a true friend. And all of us know there's something beautiful and meaningful about the unwavering dedication to something or someone.

You think about, for instance, that employee who's dedicated to the company through the highs and the lows. You think about that sweet old couple celebrating 50 years or 60 years of marriage.

You think about those poor fans who have stuck with their team year after year after year of losing seasons. I wasn't going to pick on the Vikings this time.

Or you think about that friend that stood by you in those hard moments of life. You think about that soldier who was unwilling to leave another man behind.

Faith family, listen, for those of you in this place, those of you listening online that know this to be true, you know there is nothing more valuable than this.

[12 : 02] You got a friend in me. You got a friend in me. Come on, let's wrangle up the cow. When you're roadless, Rub my head in your mouth, Put your nice warm bed.

Round them up, cowboy. Just remember what your old pal said. Boy, you got a friend in me.

Yee-haw! That you got a friend in me.

You will be humming that the rest of the night. And you're welcome. Look at me. That's exactly what the Apostle Paul experiences in Acts chapter 9.

And you keep that imagery of Pee-wee and Jackie together, because you're going to see an example of that here in the Scriptures. Let me first set up the context of what Paul was going through in his newly sent out ministry, verse 19.

It says, The first thing we see here is the evangelistic ministry of the Apostle Paul.

[13 : 34] Paul is going to start preaching the gospel. And Luke tells us that Paul does this immediately upon his conversion.

He starts doing the very thing that Jesus has called him to do. Now, we should point out the irony here, that here you have a man who's devoted his life to persecuting Christians, who now is hanging out with Christians.

I mean, seriously, literally the very people in these verses are the very people Saul was on his way to kill, or at least drag into prison.

And now he's sharing coffee with them. Now he's hanging out with them in their homes. Here's a very important point, Faith Family. Jesus will transform you in ways you never imagined.

If you would have told Paul one chapter earlier, Hey, guess what? Here in just a few verses, you're going to be hanging out with Christians. He might have killed you. He could have never, ever imagined that this would be where his life would end up.

[14 : 40] But that's what happens when Jesus interrupts our life. And I bet you there's some of you here tonight that never thought you'd be here. You never thought you'd be doing what you're doing right now on a Saturday night.

But Jesus can transform you in ways you never imagined. Amen? But upon starting this new ministry, it doesn't take long for Saul to realize what Jesus said back in verse 15.

Look at it, chapter 9, verse 15. But the Lord said to him, Go, this was to Ananias, because Saul is a chosen instrument of mine. He's going to carry my name before the Gentiles and the kings and the children of Israel.

Verse 16, watch. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name. And those of you that know much about the New Testament or the rest of the book of Acts, you know this.

This is going to be the rest of Paul's life. We're starting to see the first glimpse of what Paul, and again, I had the privilege to go on sabbatical and follow the footsteps and study Paul's life and trace this out over years, how this man everywhere he would go, faced heckling, he was booed in every stadium he went in.

[15:59] They hated him, and they wanted him dead. And he was persecuted around every corner. And I want to give you three ways, in this particular passage of Acts 9, three ways that Paul was persecuted.

Number one, Paul's ministry was questioned. Paul's ministry was questioned. Pick it up again in verse 21. And all who heard him were amazed and said, Is this not the man that made havoc in Jerusalem and those who call upon his name?

And has he not come here? In other words, isn't the point of his ministry to bring them bound before the chief priest? They had a hard time believing Saul was legit.

They had a really difficult time believing this was Paul's ministry. That word amazed is not to be taken in a positive light. It was hard for them to believe it.

That's why they were amazed. That's why I told you last week, earlier in chapter 9, when Ananias, remember the Lord gives him a vision and says there's a man named Saul, and you're going to go lay your hands on him so that he'll receive sight.

[17:10] And you remember Ananias' response? I've heard about this man. Like, I know what he's done. I know about the evil that he's caused in Jerusalem.

There are hesitations. There are doubts about Paul. In fact, I believe that had the Lord not revealed it to Ananias, there's no way he could have believed it. But because the Lord revealed it to him, he had to believe.

I wonder if some of you this evening, there's people that have ever questioned you or questioned your faith before. You're a Christian? I mean, like, I know you.

You're a Christian. You believe in that? But I'll tell you this, family, from a lot of experience. In the mission of Christ, people will question you more than an SAT exam.

You will be questioned frequently if you follow Jesus. But even though they question Paul's ministry, guess what Paul's going to do?

[18:12] He's going to keep preaching. And so must we. Amen? Number two, not only is his ministry questioned, but even worse, his life is threatened.

Paul's life is threatened, verse 23. Now, when many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, but their plot became known to Saul.

They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him. And these are his very own people. His very own people turned on him.

The very Jews that he was friends with, had grown up with, knew all his life, now want him dead.

Notice this on the screen. The very people that thought Paul was great now want Paul in a grave.

Oh, how fickle people are. They want Paul, this person they've known for years, who was this great leader of Judaism, they want him dead.

[19:13] And then it not only happens in Damascus, it happens when he returns to Jerusalem.

Look at verse 28 of chapter 9. So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.

And when he spoke, a dispute against the Hellenists, but they were seeking to kill him. And as you keep going, as we will in the book of Acts, you're going to see that this is lather, rinse, repeat for the Apostle Paul's life.

Here's how Paul's, here's like Paul's Monday morning schedule. Here it goes. You ready? Here's a look into his calendar. Wake up, go preach, get persecuted, and have to escape town.

Here's Tuesday. Wake up, go preach, get persecuted, have to leave town. Wait till you get to Wednesday. Go preach, get persecuted, have to leave town.

It wasn't quite every 24 hours, but that was the, much of the ongoing ministry that Paul faced. And I wonder how many of us, maybe you've not had your actual life threatened.

[20:22] That's probably not true for anybody. Maybe one or two, I don't know. But I bet you've had your life, parts of your life, or relationships in your life threatened because of your faith in Jesus.

Maybe some of you've lost friends. Maybe some of you have family members that don't want to speak to you. Maybe you've lost opportunities in the work field because they knew you were a Christian or because you stood up for your faith.

Listen, there is no mission without persecution. Paul's ministry was questioned. His life was threatened, and we're not even done. Number three, Paul's integrity was doubted.

Paul's integrity was doubted. I take this from verse 26. Look at it. And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples.

These are his people now. Right? He has been converted. He's one of them. And he tries to join them, and they were all afraid of him. Underline this.

[21 : 27] For they did not believe that he was a disciple. So similar to Damascus, now you have Christians in Jerusalem who are skeptical of Paul, but there is a difference in the text that I'm trying to note, and it's this.

In one example, they doubt his calling. He's not here to minister. He's here to drag us back to the chief priest. Here they're not doubting his calling.

They're doubting his conversion. We don't think he's a disciple. We don't think he's actually a follower of Jesus. For all we know, Paul is simply masquerading himself as a Christian so that he can get close enough to kill us.

Do you see how Paul's first few days and weeks of ministry went? But what did Jesus say to Ananias? I'm going to show him how he's going to have to suffer for my name's sake.

You had spent your life killing Christians. Now you're going to spend your life suffering as one. But Paul will do this joyfully. It will be the thing he'll give his life to.

[22 : 39] And so in Acts 9, his ministry is questioned, his life is threatened, his integrity is doubted, and this is just the beginning. I mean, he's going to face criticism and questioning and persecuting the rest of his ministry.

He'll be told he's not a real apostle. He'll be told that his gospel is too Gentile. It's not Jewish enough. Here's one example from Corinthians 2, verse 1.

When I came to you, brothers, I didn't come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech and wisdom. I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I was with you in weakness.

That encourages me. Does it you? Do you imagine the apostle Paul, greatest missionary in the book of Acts, in weakness and fear and much trembling?

And my speech and message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but a demonstration of the spirit and of power, so your faith might not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. Paul's saying this because one of the criticisms that Paul faced was, he's not a very good speaker.

[23 : 42] He's a trembling mess. Look at the guy. He doesn't carry himself as anything strong. He doesn't speak with any kind of plausible words. And Paul says, I know because it wasn't about me.

It was the power of God in Christ. Here's another example. I'm not even close to my main point, so stay with me. Philippians 1.15, some preach Christ from envy and rivalry, others from goodwill.

The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ that of selfish ambition, not sincerely, but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. I've told you this before. One of the things that the apostle Paul faced was, you know, a lot of bad things happen to Paul. How can he be anointed of God?

How can he be a true apostle when he's always in trouble? I mean, I mean, and this is kind of the health, wealth, prosperity thought, right? I mean, if God loves you, isn't he just going to bless you?

[24 : 46] I mean, isn't your life just going to go, you know, sugar and spice and everything nice? If you're really obedient to the Lord, wouldn't all good things happen to you?

And so clearly, bad things happen to Paul everywhere he goes. He must not be legit. He must not be a real apostle. Look at him.

He's in prison. And this would go on and on and on and on and on. I wonder if any of you have critics in your life. You know, those grumpy old men, they don't have to be grumpy or old or men. But those people in your life that love to complain and criticize and needle you and grind at you, this was the opening pages of Paul's new ministry.

Doesn't it sound like fun? Like, doesn't it sound like being on mission for Jesus is a wonderful time? Who's ready to sign up for this great adventure?

[25 : 50] Why are you looking at me that way? You wonder why many people who are in it for very long will have seasons where they ask, is it worth it?

Is it really worth all of this? We're seeing what I told you back. I mentioned it earlier, but we saw this back at the beginning of the book of Acts.

Notice it on the screen again. Faith family, there is no mission without persecution. And I'm going to keep telling you that. Do you know why? Because Jesus does. Blessed are the persecuted. This mission will be hard. But take heart, he has overcome the world. And greater is he that's in us than he that's in the world.

It's not a despair. It's not a lack of joy. It's an awareness that we are in a spiritual war. And there will be persecution.

[26 : 53] Now here's, I've said all that, which I trust is biblical and straight from the text, but I've actually said all that to set something else up. And here's what I'll spend the next two hours on.

Assuming Paul is human, and he is, he was, and struggles with the same kind of discouragement as we do, and he did.

Not only did we just read it in Corinthians, I'm going to show it to you later in the book of Acts, where Paul's going to come back from Athens, and he's going to be done. Paul knew discouragement, and so the question I'm asking is this, what kept him going?

What kept him going? And I would say, is it his passion for Jesus? That's probably number one. Was it his love for the gospel? Probably 1B.

Was it his desire to impact people in all nations? You better believe it. But there is another very important ingredient in persevering in the mission.

[28 : 03] Listen to me. There is another very, very, very, extremely important ingredient and ministry in persevering in the ministry of Christ.

Friendship. Friendship. men and women who in the face of all the booing, all the threats, come and put their arm around Paul and believe in him, love him, and strengthen him for the mission.

Let me show you verse 25. It's even more clear in verse 27, but let's start with 25. It says this, but his disciples took him by night when they saw all that was, you know, happening to him, that his life was on the line.

They took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket. Now look at an even clearer example in verse 27.

But, say it, Barnabas. Barnabas took him. This is right after they're saying, he's not a disciple. He's not legit.

[29 : 18] We don't believe he's one of us. We think he's a fake. He's a phony. He's masquerading to harm us. And Barnabas takes him and brings him to the apostles and declares to them how on the road he had seen the Lord who spoke to him and how at Damascus he preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

You see, Luke, thank you, Luke. Thank you, Lord, through Luke, for showing us two things here. The evangelistic ministry of Paul but the encouragement ministry of Barnabas.

It's such a beautiful picture. The disciples in Damascus and Barnabas in Jerusalem could have kept their distance like everybody else was doing but here's something I think we undervalue in this mission that we are all on.

Listen to me, faith family. It takes all kinds of ministries to keep this mission going. I'm going to say it again. It takes all kinds of ministries to keep the mission going.

Notice this on the screen. Paul did the work of evangelism and Barnabas is doing the work of encouragement and both were absolutely critical for the gospel to continue to be proclaimed.

[30 : 37] Both are required. In fact, I think that's what Luke is trying to show us. It's why I'm slowing down in this text to show it to you. Verse 27, Barnabas took him, brought him to the apostles, declared to them how on the road he'd seen the Lord.

He spoke to them how at Damascus he preached boldly in the name of Jesus. Stop. So Barnabas is encouraging. He's coming alongside Paul and he's standing with Paul and notice what Luke says next.

So Saul went in and out among them at Jerusalem preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.

Faith family, look at me right here. What was the outcome of Barnabas' encouragement? Answer, Paul kept preaching.

It's exactly what Luke is trying to show you. This man was being doubted as to whether or not he was even a disciple. Barnabas would have none of it and he would stand, Pee Wee would stand there with Jackie and put his arm around him and say, I'm with him and do you know what?

[31 : 47] Jackie kept playing. Paul kept preaching. Notice it again on the screen. You don't have Paul's evangelism without the encouragement of Barnabas.

believe me when I tell you that Christians need to realize, I need to be reminded that there is no limit to what we can stir one another up to accomplish for the Lord when we are willing to take on the ministry of encouragement.

Now, don't misunderstand what I'm saying. Does this mean that Barnabas is exempt from evangelism? No.

In fact, who's going to join Paul on some missionary journeys? Barnabas. Does this exempt Paul from the ministry of encouragement? No. No, no, no.

I'm not saying that at all. I'm simply saying this. God uses all of our gifts and strengths to fulfill the mission. He takes the beautiful tapestry of how He's gifted us and He brings it together to keep the mission going.

[33 : 05] Notice it on the screen, Faith Family. Faithfulness in the mission is fueled by gospel friendships. Faithfulness in the mission is fueled by gospel friendships. Hear me.

Please hear me. God, speak to us. Paul doesn't do what God has called Paul to do. Are you listening? If Barnabas doesn't do to Paul what God had called Barnabas to do.

I'm going to say it again. Lean in and listen. Paul doesn't do the ministry God has called Paul to do. If Barnabas doesn't do the ministry to Paul that God has called Barnabas to do.

That's the beauty of the body of Christ. As I said, Jackie Robinson's keep playing because there are peewees that stand with them. And that's the impact of the overlooked ministry of encouragement.

And so all I'm going to do the remainder of our time, and I tease about being long, but just a few moments, I'm simply going to spend the rest of our time talking about the ministry of encouragement.

[34 : 12] I think this is so critically important. It's why I titled the message An Overlooked Ministry of the Mission. we don't realize how important this is.

So let me just give you a few things as to why the Barnabas, I mean, we talk about, listen, there are no tours about the footsteps of Barnabas. You think about that.

Oh, there are footsteps of the Apostle Paul. I mean, are you kidding me? When you got those kinds of years of evangelism and how many lives were changed, people will come from all around the world to follow your footsteps.

But what I'm telling you is behind those footsteps are other footsteps, Barnabases, that just simply have their arms around them encouraging them along.

And we must not for a moment neglect that ministry or assume it isn't significant. Are you with me?

[35 : 15] So here we go. Number one, the ministry of encouragement is something anyone can do. The ministry of encouragement is something anyone can do. Yes, some are better at it than others.

Amen? It's why it's a spiritual gift. But while some are, have you ever just met somebody that's just like, my goodness, they have a gift of encouragement. I mean, encouragement just oozes out of them.

For some of us, we have to try harder to be encouraging. But either way, even though some are better than others, it's still something we can all do. You may not have a lot of money to give.

You might not have a lot of time in your schedule. You may think you're too old or too young to serve. But listen, every single person in this place can do this.

You can walk around and thank our volunteers on a weekend. friend. You can write an encouragement note to your pastor. And no, I'm not asking for that, but I ain't going to be too proud in a sermon like this to say there aren't days I need to read that note.

[36 : 23] Being kind and gracious to new people when they come in the door. Writing an email to that friend in the faith family who you know is going through a hard time.

there are billions of examples I could give you of things that we can all do to take on the ministry of encouragement to one another.

Because you never know that Wednesday morning when you hit sin that that was the morning they were about ready to give up. And through that email you put your arm around them and they kept playing.

Number two, the ministry of encouragement is not just something anybody can do. It's something everybody needs. It's something everybody needs. I don't care how influential you are, how secure you are, how much money you have, how mature of a Christian you are.

Encouragement never fails to fuel us and help us. And those in the trenches of leadership need massive doses of it.

[37 : 27] Because I struggled in this sermon thinking like you don't want to come across like you're needy. you know what that's called? Pride.

We all need encouragement. All of us need encouragement. And it's something that everybody, even if you're having a good day, it's still something that gives you fuel in the mission. It's why the writer of Hebrews says this, this is Hebrews 10 24, let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but what faith family?

Encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near. The ministry of encouragement is something anybody can do. It's something everybody needs.

Thirdly, as I would add this, it must go beyond surface level. The ministry of encouragement goes beyond surface level. Here's what I mean. Biblical encouragement isn't focused on complimenting someone's haircut and telling them how good their homemade salsa tastes.

[38 : 38] That's nice and if you do make great homemade salsa, it would encourage me if you'd give me some. Your pastor loves salsa.

But biblical encouragement goes deeper than that, faith family. Here's what biblical encouragement is. It's when you speak to the evidences of God's grace in their life.

Barnabas is not saying, you know what, Paul? I know you're having a really tough time and I know the Jews want to kill you, but man, those sandals are sweet and they just, they go with your cloak, beautiful.

I mean, you really, really, you're on to something. No. It's deeper than that, isn't it? it's like Pee-wee stepping in the ring saying, I'll take the heckles as well.

And don't just throw stuff at Jackie. You bring it to me too because I'm standing with him. Barnabas speaks to the grace of God in Saul's life.

[39 : 49] What does the text say? I'm not making this up, Faith Family. What does the text say? Barnabas says, let me tell you about what happened to this man on the road to Damascus.

Let me tell you how I've been there with him watching him preach boldly the name of Jesus. Let me tell you what you don't see. Let me tell you what you don't know.

I've been in the trenches with this man. He's good. He ain't perfect, but he's good. His conversion is legit.

He's a disciple of the Lord Jesus, and the Lord's going to use this man, whether you agree with it or not. Are you with me? I went off a little bit there.

It's all right. My point is that this goes beyond a wow, that's a really nice outfit you have on, but it's this. You know what? I see the grace of God in your life.

[40 : 49] You're not perfect. Trust me. I've seen you in several contexts, so I can tell you the good and I can tell you the bad, but God has his hand on you. God has his grace on you, and you speak that into their life.

Biblical encouragement faith family gets to who they are. It gets to how God is using them. It gets to the impact they have. It gets to why they matter.

It gets to why you value them. Are you with me? That's biblical encouragement. And there are, listen, I don't have time to name names, but there are people in this faith family who are some of the most gracious Barnabases I've ever met in ministry, who love me and have encouraged me in moments of discouragement and I can't thank you enough.

The ministry of encouragement matters. You with me? Everybody can do it. Everybody needs it. It goes beyond the surface level.

I have three more and they're all theological, but that's a good thing. Look, number four is the ministry of encouragement reflects the heart of God. God cares for the broken spirit.

[42 : 14] You remember what James says? God hates the prideful, but he gives grace to the humble. Right? God loves the broken spirit.

The person who feels like, I give up, I can't do anything else, that's when God lifts them up and encourages them.

In fact, this is what Isaiah 42 says, a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench.

God is our strength in weakness, and he lifts us up as on eagle wings. Amen? Number five is that the ministry of encouragement reflects the role of the Holy Spirit.

It reflects the role of the Holy Spirit. Let me show you verse 30 of chapter nine. We're almost done, hang with me. Verse 30 of chapter nine.

[43 : 16] Actually, verse 31, sorry, it should be verse 31. So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee, Samaria, had peace and was being built up and walking in the fear of the Lord, and you notice what's highlighted here, the comfort of the paraclete, the Holy Spirit.

Paraclete. Para or cleo means to call, para means alongside. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is paraclete.

It is called to come alongside. It's why in John trivia, why in John 14 and John 16, the Holy Spirit is translated as the helper.

The helper. Because it's the ministry of the Holy Spirit to come alongside, to carry us along. Faith family, listen to me.

Oh, this is a whole sermon. When we take on the ministry of encouragement, we come as close to the work of the Holy Spirit as anything else we can do in the family of God.

[44 : 27] It's the work of the Spirit to come alongside, to be our helper when you come alongside and you put your arm around that person, you help them in the mission, you are imaging the work of the Holy Spirit.

Lastly, it reflects the gospel of Jesus. It reflects the gospel of Jesus. What is at the heart of the gospel? That you and I were dead in our sins, but Jesus came and lifted us up out of the grave. We weren't just in despair, we were dead, and Jesus lifted us up, gave us new life. He took us from a place of despair and deadness to a place of hope and life through his saving work.

Is there anybody here tonight that's going to say the ministry of encouragement isn't important after all of that? God is the spirit and the son. It's the overlooked ministry of the mission.

It's the very thing God used in Paul's life to keep going. And I believe, faith family, that there are many Christians who are drying on the vine because of a lack of encouragement.

[45 : 52] They're lonely. They feel forgotten. They feel far from home. Maybe they're sick and dying in a nursing home or a hospital.

Maybe they've been divorced or they're grieving. Maybe they're faithful behind the scenes and nobody ever even says a word. But my question to me and my question to you is this.

When is the last time you played the role of Barnabas? You said something. You gave something. You wrote something. You did something.

With the single motive to encourage someone's life. And it didn't make the headlines like massive amounts of evangelistic conversions, Paul.

But the mission kept going because of it. Barnabas. I'll end with this final story if I can get through it without getting emotional because of what it pictures.

[47 : 00] It's a story that takes the phrase man's best friend to an entirely different level. Some of you may have heard the story about the dog named Captain. He's a German shepherd's dog.

He became famous in Argentina because his owner, Miguel, passed away. According to the ABC News report, shortly after his funeral, Veronica, Miguel's wife, noticed that Captain was missing. And her and her son, they searched everywhere for this dog and could not find him. A few days later, when Veronica went to visit her husband's grave, there was Captain.

They were thrilled. They finished their visit at the graveside and they took Captain home. And in just a few short days, he was missing again. Once again, they found him there roaming in the cemetery. This went on and on until finally the cemetery workers offered to just take care of Captain themselves and let him live in the cemetery. Veronica and her son agreed.

[48 : 06] The cemetery workers, when they were interviewed by the ABC News report, said this, quote, the dog will roam around the cemetery during the day, but every night by six o'clock, he takes his place beside his master's grave and he stays there all night long.

He's done this for six years. and we don't think he'll ever leave. You got a friend in me.

You got a friend in me. When the road looks rough ahead, you got a friend in me.

And maybe you're here today and you think, you know, I don't really have a lot of true friends. Let me tell you something. Life has taught me true friends are hard to find.

Amen? But the gospel has taught me there's no greater friend than Jesus. Like the old hymn says, what a friend we have in Jesus.

[49 : 29] all our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.

Can we find a friend so faithful? Who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our every weakness.

Take it to the Lord in prayer. Faith family, the good news of the gospel is that Jesus is a friend to sinners.

And why is he the perfect friend? Because he knows what it's like to have a life filled with persecution. Because he knows what it's like to be questioned and criticized and booed and heckled by the crowd.

he knows what it's like to have people out to kill him. And he's the perfect friend because even though he knows your suffering, he promises he will never forsake you.

[50 : 45] Faith family, Jesus loves you and is not ashamed to call you his friend.

And all God's people said, amen. Pray with me. Pray with me. Lord, thank you for letting us stop in Acts 9 and just reflect on these verses.

it would be so easy to run past them like it is to assume the ministry of encouragement is, well, sure, it's important, but it doesn't really accomplish anything significant.

And yet, by your spirit, you had Luke write a testimony of how Barnabas kept the mission going because of his encouragement to Paul.

how he stood with him, arm around him, and they kept going. And I want you right now to plant in our minds and our hearts who it is that you would be calling us to in this faith family and even beyond.

[52 : 06] Maybe it's in our families, our neighborhoods. Lord, would you lay someone or a group of people, some names on our mind that you want us to be a Barnabas to?

And it'll be easy in a context like this to think, pastor, and while that is always needed and appreciated, I want us to think beyond just that.

The people sitting next to us. the people who aren't here tonight. Lord, just put on our heart by your spirit some individuals that we can do the ministry of encouragement to, to lift them up, to come alongside them, and keep them going in their mission.

And Lord, then finally, I just pray, if there is someone here tonight that has never experienced your grace of salvation, they are beaten down.

They've gone down every road they know to go down, and it's been a dead end every time. I pray that they would hear the gospel cry, Jesus is a friend to sinners.

[53 : 31] Prodigals can come home, and they will experience the love of Jesus. You know every need, and you know every heart, you know every life.

Holy Spirit, do your work, I pray. In Jesus' name, amen. If he goes Thank you.