



On your marks

11 June is St Barnabas Day. His real name was Joseph and he came from Cyprus. He was given the nickname Barnabas, which means 'son of encouragement' for good reasons. He made a generous gift to the first Christians in Jerusalem and later he persuaded them to accept the apostle Paul into their number after his dramatic conversion. He also travelled with Paul both to Cyprus and later to the area we now call Turkey in order to tell others about the story of Jesus. He seems to have been someone who naturally reached out to welcome outsiders and also, as we shall see, someone who stuck by people who had experienced a hard time or made mistakes. You can read more about him in the Bible in Acts 4:32-37; 9:26-30; 11:19-26; 13: 1-3 and 15:36-41

Get set

A flip chart or OHP Screen would be useful to write up suggested encouraging phrases and also an 'encouragement' bag filled with objects to introduce the theme of encouragement such as a good-luck card, an e-mail that has been printed off, a letter, a photo and a CD of some favourite music.

Go!

1 I wonder what sort of things really encourage you when you feel let down or left out in some way? *Take out various items from a bag and see in what ways they might be an encouragement. Items could include a good-luck card; an e-mail that has been printed off; a letter; a photo of family or friends; a CD of favourite music.*

What other things would encourage you?

2 We all need encouragement from time to time to keep going when things are tough. The best encouragement comes from a person who encourages you - someone who comes alongside like a pacemaker to keep you running on time, or a teammate in a competitive sport, or a good friend when you feel alone. What sort of things do encouragers say?

Take suggestions and write them up on a flip chart or OHP screen. Phrases like:

'You can do it' 'Come-on, keep going' 'I believe in you' 'Don't give up' 'You're just the person we need' 'Go for it' etc.

3 What sort of things do encouragers do to help us? Do they pull us along by the hand? Reach out and link-up arms? Give us a smile? What else can you suggest?

4 Arrange for groups of children to act out some scenes using the ideas that you have put up. Work in groups of four, where one person each time needs to be encouraged. What sort of things will the others say?

- a group of climbers who are almost to the top of the mountain but the weather is so bad and one person in the climbing party thinks about giving up.
- someone has had an accident and is waiting for the ambulance to arrive but feeling really

discouraged. What do his/her friends say to keep his/her spirits up?

- someone is running the marathon but has got to a point when he/she feels like giving up. What are those running alongside going say to help him/her keep going?
- someone feels like giving up the task they have been given but others nearby urge that person on to finish what they have started.
- a new person in the class feels very alone and isolated. What will others say to him/her to encourage him/her not to give up and run away?
- someone has made a real mess of things - maybe on the sports field or with their school work - and feels like packing it all in. What can encouraging friends say and do?

5 Wouldn't it be good to be known as someone who was an encourager? There was just such a person in the Bible. His real name was Joseph but he was given the nickname of encourager or son of encouragement. The word in his language for this was Barnabas and this is the name by which we know him. Today is his special day.

6 Tell the story of Barnabas in your own words including the following:

- he encouraged the Church by giving a very generous gift to help them with their work in Jerusalem.
- he encouraged those same people to welcome the outsider Paul, of whom they were very afraid because he had been against the Church. However Paul had now become a Christian and Barnabas helped his friends to overcome their suspicion of this outsider.
- he encouraged his local church in a place called Antioch by being one of its leaders and also was prepared to travel off to tell other people about the story of Jesus.
- he encouraged his young friend (possibly his cousin) Mark, who on the first mission journey with Paul had turned back and so had, it seems, let everyone down. Barnabas stuck by him even though it meant that Barnabas no longer stayed with Paul on a second mission journey. He stayed by Mark even when it meant not doing something he really wanted to do.

7 How can you be someone who is an encourager today? How can we make this an encouragement day in memory of Barnabas? I wonder who needs some encouragement in your group or class? I wonder what encouraging things you can say or do to help those who feel left out or let down?

8 You can read more about Barnabas and find some other ideas for this assembly or session with your children in BRF's book [Stories of Everyday Saints](#) by Veronica Heley (see page 46 in the book).

9 Here's a prayer with which you could end the assembly or session:

*Father God,
Thank-you for Barnabas the encourager and all that he teaches us about encouragement.
Help us to find ways in which we can say and do encouraging things for others today.
Help us to notice others who feel left out or let down.
Thank you for the encouraging story of Jesus who can help us become encouragers.
Amen.*