

Hi, I'm Tim Shaw, one of the pastors here at First Prez. We're continuing our four-week Fresh Wind sermon series based on passages from the Book of Acts. I believe God wants us to experience the fresh wind of His Holy Spirit, blowing in our lives, filling our church, and flowing through us into a world that is in need of hope.

As the church of Jesus Christ, we have good news that people really need to hear. There is a God who is generous beyond description, and He wants to show us the depth of His generosity today.

Will you please join me in prayer.

Gracious God, we come to You today in tremendous need of hope; a hope that we can build or rebuild our lives upon. Would You please be our teacher today? Would You please speak to us through Your Word? And may the Incarnate Word, Jesus, our Lord, and Savior, guide us into Your generous heart. In His Name we pray, Amen.

Sometimes when I'm preaching or teaching, I like to just tell you right up front the point I'm hoping to make. And once I tell you what I want to say, I then like to go back and show you how I came to that conclusion. It's a little bit like watching the end of a movie or reading the last chapter in a book before you actually watch the film or start the story. So, I'm going to show you my cards right here at the beginning of this talk, and then we're going to jump into the Book of Acts and see if I can effectively make my main point.

Today's message is really a character study of one of these most remarkable people that we meet in the Book of Acts. At least I think this guy is someone to pay attention to.

He's not on the top tier of characters in the New Testament. He's not a Peter or a Mary or a Paul. Nevertheless, he is one of my heroes in the Bible.

I love the heart and character of this man. I feel like he has mentored me through the pages of the Book of Acts, even though his life and mine are separated by nearly 2000 years. He has challenged me, shaped me, and helped me become a better reflection of Jesus.

His name was Joseph, and he was originally from the Island of Cyprus, which is out in the Mediterranean. Some say Cyprus was kind of the Hawaii of the Mediterranean in the 1st century.

He was such a positive force for good in his world that people who knew him decided to give him a nickname. The best kind of nicknames are really ways people express affection for someone else.

When I was a youth pastor, my students nicknamed me "Shawfish" because they saw a "sawfish" in the Vancouver aquarium on a trip we took to British Columbia. My new nickname pretty quickly got shortened to just "Fish."



When we played basketball, one of my students would say, "Feed the fish" when they wanted me to get the ball. There's not a ton of hidden meaning to this nickname. It was just a way for them to show their affection for me.

Some nicknames are cruel and abusive. But some can almost be honorific; they recognize something very special in someone else. The nickname Joseph from Cyprus was given was that kind of name.

The people in the church nicknamed Joseph, "Son of Encouragement."

And in their language, that translated to "Barnabas." I don't know if anyone ever shortened it to "Barney," but Joe's affectionate nickname pointed to the fact that he was an incredibly affirming person. I'm sure people loved to be around this guy.

It's not hard to see why people called him Barnabas. I'm not exaggerating. Every time this guy shows up in the Book of Acts, we see him encouraging, affirming, or building up someone else. Barnabas was a man who was willing to take great personal risks to make important investments in the future of the early church. He was a person who was ready to build bridges between people who really didn't trust each another.

For example, he built a bridge between a man by the name of Saul and the leaders of the church. Last week in Pastor's Steve's sermon, we met this guy named Saul, who was violently opposed to the church when we first read about him. Before Saul met Jesus on the road to Damascus, he was convinced that his theological conviction was the correct convictions to have. He was also convinced that the followers of "The Way," the followers of Jesus, were totally wrong and were a deadly threat to the world he knew and wanted to preserve.

After Saul becomes a follower of Jesus, most of the Christians did not trust Saul because he had abused the church so mercilessly until the day Saul met the risen Christ. That day, God began to change Saul's life.

Barnabas trusted the work of God in the lives of other people — even a person like Saul. Barnabas risked his reputation to bring Saul to the leaders of the church. Because of who he was, Barnabas was able to convince the leaders of the church that they could trust that Saul, or Paul, was really a disciple of Jesus.

Barnabas believed that God could transform the life of a person that others had given up on. When the Apostle Paul (that's the same guy who was named Saul) — when Paul gave up on a young man named John Mark because John Mark had freaked out a little and bailed on Paul and Barnabas on their first church-planting trip, Barnabas did not give up on this young man.

I'm going to focus on that story a little later in this talk. But again and again, Barnabas lived up to that affectionate nickname he was given.

Before we take a closer look at the life of Barnabas, I want to retell a story that I think illustrates the heart of generosity we see in this man.

As we continue on our Raise the Sails generosity journey, I want to challenge us to think about what it would look like in our own lives, in our families, in our workplaces, in our church, in our community, in our nation if we too earned a nickname like the one Joseph earned.

Here's the bottom line. Here's what I want to challenge all of us to think about. How are we as individuals, as families, as friends, as a church-going to earn a similar nickname to the one Barnabas received from his friends?

What are we going to need to keep on doing, and what are some new things we're going to need to do to earn a nickname like that? What will that kind of sacrificial generosity look like in each of our lives?

What will that generosity look like in our church? How will the world around us begin to wonder, "What is going on in that church? Everywhere I go, I run into someone from First Prez, and they are encouraging and blessing others. What is going on?"

Our God is a generous God, and He wants to remake us in His own image. God wants to transform us so that the world might know that at the center of the universe is extravagant generosity.

As we'll see in a minute, Barnabas was a man who lived his life as an incredibly generous person. Many

of his acts of generosity had a profound impact on many, many people. As we'll see, his acts of generosity moved the early church forward and out into the world with the deeply hopeful message of the gospel.

But the story I want to tell first took place in our country in the 1930s. And quite surprisingly, it's the story that develops around a horse — by the name of Seabiscuit.



I've been told that what happened in the story of Seabiscuit played a role in encouraging our nation during a very dark and painful time in the history of our country. Seabiscuit is both a great book by Laura Hillenbrand, and it's a fantastic movie that illustrates this really important value of generosity that I think should live at the core of our lives as followers of Jesus.

Seabiscuit is a story about generosity. It tells the story of how people drew the best out of one another when their lives were filled with disappointment, uncertainty, and pain. That's a message I think we need to hear today.

We are living through a very difficult time in the history of our nation and world. Many people are simply emotionally exhausted. I know that I get worn out sometimes. There are just so many difficult challenges to address.

During this difficult year, some have lost loved ones due to COVID-19. Some people have lost their jobs and their homes. Others have experienced terrible tension in their families and friendships. Life-long friends are no longer speaking to one another because they have different political perspectives. The election we've gone through has shown us that there is much that unites us, but there are indeed deep divides that exist across our great nation.

We are living in very challenging times. We want to believe that we will one day emerge from this difficult, sometimes lonely, often scary chapter in our lives. We WILL emerge from it. But we have no idea how much longer all of this will go on.

In the 1930s, we were facing the consequences of the 1929 stock market crash. Our country was trying to find our way through the Great Depression. Our economy had collapsed. Millions of people were out of work and were desperately trying to figure out how they and their families would simply survive. We were a nation that wondered whether there was any real reason to hope again.

The world was also a very volatile place. Adolf Hitler and other despots were on the rise around the world. Less than 20 years before, we had lived through a devastating world war, and we were still trying to find our way back to something that felt close to "normal."

The story of this small, sometimes broken-down horse that few people thought was capable of winning a race, became for many, a symbol of hope for our country. The courage of the people in this story and the courage of this horse brought encouragement to a hurting and broken nation. People began to believe that good things were still possible for us.

Here's one of the open scenes from Seabiscuit that helps us place this story squarely in the devastating decade of the 1930s.

Click [here](#) to watch the scene.

The boy in that scene who gave his dad the two dollars he had just earned is Johnny Pollard. He's the boy who grew up to be the jockey who rode Seabiscuit to many impressive victories. They gave him the nickname "Red" because of his red hair.

In the next scene, his parents meet the man who hired Red as a jockey. Johnny's parents make the incredibly difficult decision to give their son into the care of this man. They had come to the painful conclusion that they were not going to be able to support Johnny and the rest of his siblings. It's a tough scene to watch.

We'll come back to the story of Seabiscuit at the end of this sermon.

Think of all the difficult, heart-breaking decisions people had to make in the 1930s. There are a lot of people in our own community, state, nation, and world who are also making very difficult, life-impacting choices.

The same was true for the first Christians, who were living in an extremely hostile environment. They, too, were losing jobs.

Friends and family members ostracized them because of their faith in Jesus. Some of the leaders of the church, like Peter and John, had been thrown in prison for teaching other people that there is a God at the center of the universe who loves them.

Peter and John were hauled before the religious leaders of their day, who demanded that they stop teaching people about Jesus, the One who came into the world to die for our sins so that we might live.

It's in that context that we meet a man from Cyprus named Joseph. If you have a Bible handy, turn to Acts 4:32. We're going to meet the "Son of Encouragement."

With all the challenges the early church was facing, we read, in verse 32...

"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power, the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need."

Now here comes the Generous Hero.

"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."

That's the first time we meet Barnabas in the Book of Acts. And what do we see him doing? We see him liquidate a piece of property and bring the proceeds to the leaders of the church and place it in their hands. "Here," he says to the church leaders. "I want you to have this."

What would motivate this man to take this really risky step of selling a piece of land and then give the money he earned from the sale over to the church? That piece of property probably represented a percentage of his retirement savings. Why would Barnabas take that risk?

Quite simply, he was a man whose heart was being formed by the generous heart of Jesus.

As he looked at his fellow believers, what did he see? He saw a generous community that was caring for one another and caring for the needs of the world around them.

As we read this passage in Acts 4, it is unmistakable that the first Christians were very generous people. They came together and took care of one another's needs in a very difficult and uncertain time in their lives.

Barnabas simply decided that he wanted in on that. If this is what being a follower of Jesus is all about, if this is what Jesus' church is all about, "I want in on that." That's the decision Barnabas made.

He said to himself, "I'm going to make a sacrificial, financial investment in the work of the church of Jesus." He believed that it wasn't going to be the Roman government. It wasn't going to be the religious structures of his day that were going to bring hope to his world.

Only Jesus, working in and through His church, was going to bring the ultimate hope His world needed. That's the conclusion he came to. That's why he sold property and brought the proceeds to be used by the

church. He wanted to be a part of bringing God's Kingdom from heaven to earth.

We have a similar opportunity in this moment in the history of our church. Many of you have already made a decision. You've said, "When I look at the opportunities to impact the world for the Kingdom of God that our church has, I want in on that."

Some of you may have been able to spend some time yesterday out at our Ko'olau campus on a Fresh Wind Prayer Walk. We went out there to ask God what He might have in mind for this beautiful piece of Hawaii. How might God want to continue to use what He has entrusted into our care? How does God want to bless our Islands and the world through us?

Some of you might still be asking God what He might want you to do to make a sacrificial investment in our church's future. That's great. We are all praying that God will speak to each one of us about what He might ask each of us to do.

It is so exciting to think about what might be possible on our Ko'olau campus, at our campus here in Kaka'ako, called The Vine, and now through our online digital campus. God wants to use you and me to show the world the good news of the gospel. These islands, our country, our world needs God's Kingdom to come from heaven to earth.

Barnabas, the "Son of Encouragement," looked at the challenges and the opportunities in front of him and the church in his day, and he said, "I want in on that."

His financial investment was very important. It helped move the mission of the Kingdom forward. But there were also other very important investments that Barnabas made.

Where ever he shows up in the Book of Acts, he lives up to his nickname. I want to encourage you to read his story this week. You won't regret it. I love this guy. Let me briefly outline how God used this generous man to make so much good possible.

The Bridge Builder: Acts 9:17-30

As I pointed out at the beginning of this talk, he was a bridge-builder. In Acts 9:17-30, Barnabas built a bridge between Saul and the church. Saul would go on, as the Apostle Paul, to plant churches and strengthen communities of Christians across what is now modern-day Turkey, Greece, and Italy. Barnabas joined Paul on the first church-planting trip, risking his life to share the good news of the gospel.

What would have happened if Barnabas had not built that bridge between Saul and the Christian community? What would have been lost if Barnabas was not the kind of generous person who was willing to take a risk and make way for Paul to find a place in the church. The Apostle Paul is the person who authored as many as 13 of the 36 books in the New Testament. What might have been lost if Barnabas did not live up to his nickname?

A Good Person Full of the Holy Spirit and Faith: Acts 11:1-30

In Acts 11:1-30, we see more of the impact of this man's life. In Acts 11:24, Barnabas is described this way:

"He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord." Some who came to put their trust in Christ did so because when they heard the good news of the gospel and when they saw the generous life of Barnabas, they said, "I want in on that."

The Mentor: Acts 13:1-14

In Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas are sent out by the church in Syrian Antioch to go and tell the Gentiles about Jesus. The two of them bring along a young man by the name of John Mark to be their helper. The three of them head to Cyprus, and I'm sure that Barnabas spent a lot of time mentoring and encouraging this young friend along the way.

It was a wild ride for this little team, and at one point, this young guy, probably in his late teens, came to the

conclusion that he'd signed up for more than he'd bargained for. So, John Mark tells Paul and Barnabas that he's not going any further. A third of the way through their first missionary journey, John Mark tells them that he's done. "I'm going home."

That's a decision that would not sit well with Paul.

All In Acts 14:1-28

Don't miss what happens in Acts 14 as Paul and Barnabas continue their journey. Their trip across Cyprus was just a warm-up to what happens in Asia Minor. Crazy things happen. God shows up, and people come to know and entrust their lives to Jesus. These two guys were beaten and thrown out of towns. But it didn't matter to Barnabas. He was all in!

Guardian of the Faith: Acts 15:1-12

You're also going to want to read what unfolds in Acts 15. Barnabas takes part in one of the most important theological discussions in the history of the church. At the end of that debate, the church settled on this essential conviction. The Apostle Peter stands up in the Jerusalem Council and declares, *"We believe that it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved. (Acts, 15:11)*. It's not by being good enough for God. We are saved when we trust, not in our own goodness, but when we put our trust in the trustworthiness of Jesus. Barnabas was a part of that discussion. He was a guardian of the faith.

Life-Changer: Acts 15:36-41

The final chapter that we have in the story of this Generous Hero is also in Acts 15:36-41.

"Sometime later, Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing."

That was a really great idea. But something tragic happens. These two friends, these two partners in ministry that God had used in such powerful ways, have such an explosive disagreement with one another that they agree to go their separate ways.

The text of Scripture continues, *"Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord. (Paul and Silas) went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches."*

God was at work, even in this fractured relationship. God now had two teams that were ready to tell people about Jesus.

But, I have to be honest with you — you can disagree with me — people have in the past. But I am just a little disappointed with Paul at this moment in his life.

Barnabas had risked a lot to make way for Paul to be welcomed into the Christian community when no one else was willing to believe that Paul actually was a follower of Jesus. Barnabas did that for Paul. But at this moment, Paul was unwilling to take a chance on this young man, John Mark.

I thank God for Barnabas. Let's look at the "Son of Encouragement" in action. What does he do? He once again takes a risk on John Mark. He believes that God is at work in the life of John Mark. He believes that God is not done with this young man. Yes, in the past, John Mark didn't follow through on his commitments. But that was not a barrier for the "Son of Encouragement."

What would have happened if Barnabas had not given John Mark another chance? What would have been lost if Barnabas was not the kind of generous person who was willing to take a risk on someone who had failed in the past? Do you have any idea who John Mark is?

John Mark is the man who grows up to write the Gospel according to Mark. Even though it is the second book in the New Testament, scholars believe that the Gospel of Mark was the first to be written.

Do we end up with the Gospel of Mark if Barnabas did not take a chance on this young man?

Towards the end of his life, it appears that Paul's opinion of Mark has changed. Writing from prison, Paul asks Timothy to, "*Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.*" *2 Timothy 4:11*. I'm sure Barnabas ultimately had something to do with that change of heart.

In the closing scene of the film *Seabiscuit*, the filmmakers capture the kind of generous heart I've been talking about, and we've been reading about in the life of Barnabas.

In this final race, both Red Pollard and *Seabiscuit* are recovering from injuries. The other jockeys know that Red is hurting, and *Seabiscuit* is not as strong as he might be. So, they deliberately bump into him, trying to intimidate him. *Seabiscuit* begins to fall behind all the other horses. He is clearly going to cross the finish line in last place.

But Red Pollard has a friend named George, who is also in that race. And George knows something about *Seabiscuit*. He knows that when *Seabiscuit* has another horse run alongside him, all the power and potential that *Seabiscuit* has can be drawn out of him.

So, George sacrifices his chances in the race, slows down, and starts to run alongside Red and *Seabiscuit*. That act of sacrificial generosity is what we've been talking about. That kind of sacrificial generosity is what we see in Barnabas. And it's that kind of generosity that God wants to form in you and me.

Here's the final scene from the film *Seabiscuit*.

Click [here](#) to watch the final scene.

Barnabas was a person who was willing to slow down and run alongside someone else. He was the kind of person who believed in what God could do in the lives of other people. He was a person who spent his entire life, encouraging others to become all that God intended for them to be. It didn't matter what mistakes they had made in their past. Barnabas knew that God could work miracles in anyone's life.

Jesus Christ entered our broken-down human story. He gave His life so that we might have life everlasting. He gave Himself so that we might live with hope. We have an extravagantly generous God who wants to make us generous people.

Who wants in? Let's pray together.

Loving and gracious God, we are so thankful that You are indeed a God of boundless generosity. Would You make us even more generous people?

I thank You for this great church and all the incredibly generous people who have already said, "I want in on what You are doing in and through our church." Father, I want to humbly ask that You pour out Your blessings on every person who is listening to my voice. Come Holy Spirit and fill us with Your generous heart.

And as we consider the sacrificial investments You want us to make in other people — to encourage and build them up — and as we think about the investments You are calling us to make in the mission of our church, would You guide us, empower us and lead each one of us. In Jesus' Name I pray, Amen.

Have a great week! Aloha!

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