



Encouragement for the Adventure!

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Acts 11:19-23

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As we talk about taking the adventure our Lord has for us, there are several marvelous adventures on the horizon. On Wednesday evening, June 23, we join in a congregational Zoom gathering at 8 p.m. for a conversation with Hope Lee, our coming new pastor. It will be fun to get to know Hope a little bit more and we will spend some time connecting with each other and with our Lord!

This summer we are talking about taking the adventure. Our “exterior” adventures range from the marvelous to the miserable. I had fun talking with my son-in-law about foldable kayaks we’ve ordered. Marvelous. I learned a sister was undergoing emergency back surgery. Miserable! Yet, in every case our true adventure is the interior adventure of the soul, trusting Jesus, the Lord who loves us. We ask his Holy Spirit for strength and guidance and we ask for the spirit of *hineni* which is Hebrew for “here I am, Lord.” We say *hineni* as we say, “Yes, here I am, Lord, as I take the adventure our Lord has for me.” We all have adventure partners, people with us on our adventures and those we are with on their adventures. Today, we learn a little bit about how to encourage the adventure partners in our lives.

We learn from the Book of Acts that the adventure for those early Christians was very exciting initially but became quite difficult with the stoning of Stephen. They had to flee

from Jerusalem to escape persecution, some to the city of Antioch, one hundred and fifty miles away. Acts 11 begins: ¹⁹ *Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over [the stoning of] 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 Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus.* Who were these men telling people about the Lord Jesus? We don't know. The Bible just calls them "some men." Nameless. They hadn't been to seminary. They hadn't taken Growing Your Soul. They hadn't studied how to share their faith. They simply loved Jesus and they talked about Jesus. And what happened?

²¹ *And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.* A huge, growing, dynamic life-changing church was born. What did those nameless people do that was significant? They were *hineni* people. They were "take the adventure the Lord has for us" people. They were "talk about Jesus" people. And why did that huge church spring up? "The hand of the Lord was with them." It's the combination of your availability, *hineni*, and God's ability that can lead to amazing acts of God's grace. ²² *The report of this [growing church in Antioch] came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem.* The church in Jerusalem

wanted to know more about what was going on, *and they sent Barnabas to Antioch*. Why did Barnabas go on a one-hundred-and-fifty-mile journey? Barnabas was a *hineni* person; he took the adventure God had for him. ²³ *When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he encouraged them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.*

If we want to be encouragers in the lives of our adventure partners, those we share life with, Barnabas shows us how. He does three immensely significant things. He sees the grace of God. He is glad. He encourages them to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.

He saw the grace of God! God is doing amazing things all around us all of the time. “Lord, open our eyes to see your grace moments in our lives.” I was driving home last Tuesday. I’d received an email from Pastor Connie with a link to a YouTube talk she wanted me to listen to. I clicked to listen to it as I drove along. The speakers were musicians Brian and Jenn Johnson talking about their three children and some matters concerning the possible adoption of another child. I thought, “Interesting, but why did Connie send this link?” when Jenn said, “Darlene Zschech had been with us.” My ears perked up. Darlene Zschech is an incredibly gifted writer of worship songs, such as “Shout to

the Lord” and “This is the Air I Breathe.” I’m a big fan. Jenn Johnson continued, “Darlene Zschech said the meaning of the Hebrew word *hineni*.” Okay now I’m really listening since we’ve been talking about *hineini*, Here I am, willing to serve. “*Hineni* Lord, Here I am, Lord.”

Darlene Zschech says, “The meaning of the Hebrew word *hineni* is, ‘My answer is yes before you even ask.’” I nearly drove off the road! Not just “here I am,” not just “how may I serve you” but “my answer is yes before you even ask.” That very day I called someone to ask them to undertake a significant task for VPC. She didn’t use the word *hineni* in response, but it was clear her answer was yes before even I asked! Barnabas saw the grace of God and was glad. I saw the grace of God in Darlene Zschech’s way to understand *hineni*. Open your eyes to the grace of God around you!

Barnabas sees the grace of God. Then what does he do? I love this. Imagine Barnabas, one of the leaders of the church in Jerusalem, arrives at distant Antioch and discovers a rapidly growing church that the church in Jerusalem had no formal role in starting. Barnabas could have said, “Hold on here! What do you think you are doing? I am from the Mother Church and you didn’t ask our permission!” “Barnabas saw the grace of God and was ticked off,

annoyed, critical.” Barnabas doesn’t do that. He sees the grace of God and he is glad. When you see God’s grace, be glad with a sense of wonder.

Many years ago, I was sitting in a room with fifty pastors listening to Lyle Schaller, a leading church expert. Lyle posed the following question to us. “Suppose you are at a baseball game and *crack*, the batter hits a line drive directly toward third base, but just before the ball reaches third base, it flies just slightly to the left of the third base line as it heads out to left field. Is the ball fair or foul? What do you think?” We all knew the rules of baseball and you could see us rolling our eyes thinking this is a stupid question because a ball hit to the left of the third base line is foul.

So immediately, all fifty of us in one voice said, “It’s foul.” Except that after we all answered, “Foul, obviously,” he replied, “You are wrong.” No way we were wrong. Then Lyle said, “It’s whatever the umpire calls.” He was right! Then he said words I will never forget, “In the church and in life there are many situations that can be viewed two ways, situations that have difficult, doubtful aspects to them and that also have good and hopeful aspects to them.” He paused, looked us in the eye, and said, “Learn to call things good.” He was telling us to be a Barnabas. To see the grace of God and be glad. Call it good.

The church I served in Pittsburgh built a multi-purpose addition that served as a worship center and a gymnasium. The entry lobby area was large and fairly ordinary in its décor. A couple of people approached me and asked if they could re-work the décor to make it warmer and more inviting. With a few phone calls, the answer was, “Sure, go for it.” Then I left town on a six-week study leave. When I returned, I stopped by the grocery on my way home. A lady came up to me. “Have you seen what they did to the entry lobby? I can’t believe it!” I remembered Lyle Schaller, “Call it good!” I said, “I’m just home, but isn’t it good that a team of interested people worked to create a hospitable area?” “Well, I never,” she said, and she stomped off. When I got into my car, where do you think I went? Home after six weeks away? Nope. I drove straight to church.

I walked into the lobby. The walls were painted bright orange. The furniture dark wood. I’m absorbing this. A person walks in. “What do you think?” she asked. I said (breathing deeply), “Isn’t it good that a team of interested people worked to create a hospitable area?” She said, “You know, you’re right.” And she walked away. What would have happened if I had said, “Euuuw?” The whole church would have known it in a day! As it turned out, people loved it. When you call it good, others will call it good!

In your home, in your work, in your church, in your life, yes, at times matters are genuinely out of whack, not good. We do not call such matters “good,” but we address them as is appropriate. Yet, in so much of life, you have the opportunity to be a Barnabas, to see the grace of God even if it’s not your preference. Be glad – call it good! God is doing good things among us!

We read five times in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, “God saw that it was good,” and once “and God said that it was very good.” God made it good and God called it good. Sure, you will always see the problems and they are real, not to be denied, but to be addressed. At the same time, see the grace of God and call it good! There is this coarsening of our society. We once disagreed with one another, which is perfectly fine, but now we seem to assume disagreement means we should demean, devalue, and disrespect one another. Be a Barnabas. See the grace of God and be glad.

John Powell writes, “Some time ago a friend told me...when, vacationing in the Bahamas, he saw a large and restless crowd gathered on a pier. Upon investigation he discovered that the object of all the attention was a young man making the last-minute preparations for a solo journey

around the world in a homemade boat. Without exception everyone on the pier was vocally pessimistic. ‘The sun will broil you!’ ‘You won’t have enough food!’ ‘That boat of yours won’t withstand the waves in a storm!’ ‘You’ll never make it!’

When my friend heard all these discouraging warnings to the adventurous young man, he felt an irresistible desire to offer some optimism and encouragement. [Perhaps the voyage was foolish but the young man’s decision was made.] As the little craft began drifting away from the pier toward the horizon, my friend went to the end of the pier, waving both arms wildly like semaphores spelling confidence. He kept shouting: ‘Bon Voyage!’ ‘You’re really something!’ ‘We’re with you!’ ‘We’re proud of you!’ ‘Good luck, brother!’ John Powell concluded, “There are those who feel obligated to tell us all the things that can go wrong as we set out over the uncharted waters of our unique lives. Then there are those who stand at the end of the pier, cheering us on.”¹ See the grace of God and be glad.

We see that Barnabas did three things when he arrived in Antioch. He saw the grace of God. He was glad (he called it good). And third, he encouraged them – encouraged them to remain true to the Lord. There are adventure partners in your

¹ John Powell, [Fully Human. Fully Alive](#)

life who need you to encourage them to remain true to the Lord. I once attended a Christian conference held at the Convention Center of Dallas, Texas. I went to a lecture on discipleship by a man named Bob Munger. I found his lecture so helpful that afterward I asked Bob if he would have lunch with me, which he agreed to do. We had no sooner found a table in a remote corner of the huge cafeteria when someone walked up. "Bob!" he said. "Jim!" He jumped up, they embraced, and Jim asked me to snap a picture of them. I said, "Sure," stood up, took their picture and returned to my lunch.

Two minutes passed and a lady and her grown daughter walked up. "Bob," they said. "Jean and Jennifer!" Mother and daughter. They hugged. They asked me to take a picture of them. This went on every three minutes for two hours as different people approached us who wanted to hug Bob and express their love. After lunch I went with Bob to the bus stop and rode with him on the way to our hotel. On that bus people came up to speak with him. This man lived in California, yet here we were in Dallas, and all those people knew him, loved him. It was an amazing display of Christian love. The next morning, I was having breakfast in the hotel restaurant when Bob walked in. I walked over, "May I join you?" "Of course," he said, and every two minutes, people came up to him.

When I returned home, I mentioned to a friend of mine my experience of seeing Bob Munger's incredible network of friends. John said, "I know Bob Munger and I can give you some insight. On one occasion Bob was counseling a man who was facing the toughest crisis of his life, a very intense, very difficult situation. Bob finally said to that man, 'I do not know the answer to your problem my friend, but what I do have is a heart to place alongside your heart and we are going to see this thing through together.'"² Bob was a Barnabas. He saw the grace of God. He *was* the grace of God. He was glad. He was a *hineni* person, encouraging others to remain true to the Lord, taking the adventure God had for him so that others could take what adventure God had for them.

Ask God to open your eyes to the grace of God. Be glad and call it good. When our Lord opens your eyes to a person whose adventure calls for encouragement, you become that very grace of God in that person's life, your heart alongside their heart, seeing their adventure through with them, because as a *hineni* person, your answer is yes before you are even asked.

² E. Stanley Ott, *The Joy of Discipling*, pp. 36-37.