

“Changed for Good”
Acts 9:26-30

Both Elphaba and Glinda in *Wicked* needed a deep, life-altering transformation. Elphaba needed to discover her own inherent goodness and step into her true power. Glinda needed to look beyond the surface glitter and approval-seeking of her life to find substance.

How does true transformation actually happen when the narratives we’ve believed about ourselves for years - or the labels society has slapped on us - are so deeply entrenched?

The answer is simple, yet revolutionary: **through the experience of unconditional love.**

We cannot intellectually reason our way out of deep wounds. We have to experience love within real, lived relationships before we can finally let go of the scripts of fear that govern our lives.

The unlikely friendship between Elphaba and Glinda offered both of them a safe harbor—a place where they could drop their masks and simply be themselves. On the outside, they seemed like polar opposites. Yet on the inside, both were searching for the exact same thing: to be seen, known, and loved.

Their friendship culminated in profound healing. Even when their callings diverged and they chose different paths in life, the love they shared remained permanent. Glinda chose to stay and navigate the political realities of Oz, but she helped affirm her friend’s unique journey forward.

Here is a song that captures the essence of the transformation that takes place for them: “Changed for Good” song <https://youtu.be/Sq0sS3rmhX0>

"I've heard it said that people come into our lives for a reason,
bringing something we must learn...
...Because I knew you, I have been changed for good."

Only love is strong enough to heal us.

We often chase power, control, or security, believing they will make us feel whole. Sometimes we treat intellectual knowledge as the ultimate answer - thinking that if we just read the right book or digest the latest information, our internal struggles will evaporate. We even reduce faith to a cold list of theological beliefs to accept. But facts alone cannot mend a broken heart. Nothing can truly heal our deepest wounds until we experience love in those exact places of pain.

Acts 9:26–30 — When Nobody Believed in Saul

In the Book of Acts, we encounter a story about how friendship and unconditional love can radically transform a life and alter the course of history.

We often celebrate the monumental ministry of the Apostle Paul. He planted churches across the Mediterranean, embarked on daring missionary journeys, and authored much of the New Testament outside the Gospels. But Paul's transformation and ministry were not a solo act; they were nurtured by ordinary people who chose to believe in him when no one else would.

Before he was known as Paul the Apostle, he was Saul of Tarsus - a violent persecutor who systematically dragged followers of Jesus off to prison. He was feared, despised, and rejected. Yet, key individuals offered him unconditional acceptance, providing the relational soil he needed to heal and grow into the apostle he was called to be. Chief among those believers was **Barnabas**.

We first meet him in Acts 4, where the apostles give a man named Joseph a new nickname: *Barnabas*, which translates to "Son of Encouragement." They saw in him a spirit that lifted others up. By Acts chapter 9, we witness Barnabas stepping into a high-stakes moment to defend a man everyone else wanted to write off. Let's listen to **Acts 9:26–30**:

"26 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, brought him to the apostles, and described for them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus.

28 So he went in and out among them in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. 29 He spoke and argued with the Hellenists; but they were attempting to kill him.

30 When the believers learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

The Catalyst of Encouragement

It is no exaggeration to say that Paul's entire ministry hinged on Barnabas's spirit of encouragement.

- **Barnabas opened the door** for Paul when every church door in Jerusalem was slammed shut and deadbolted.
- **Barnabas lent Paul his own credibility**, helping the cautious community see Paul not through the lens of his past violence, but through the lens of his potential in Christ.

Yes, Paul's journey began on the road to Damascus with a miraculous vision and the voice of Jesus calling his name. But that powerful divine encounter required human hands and human hearts to help him walk it out. Paul's calling required a community that would welcome him and believe in his redemption. Barnabas offered Paul the

experience of unconditional love - a grace that healed his past and empowered his future.

Later, Paul and Barnabas became missionary partners, traveling the known world together. Eventually, they reached a point where their paths diverged. They had a sharp disagreement over John Mark: Paul judged Mark as unreliable after he left an earlier trip, while Barnabas insisted on giving the young man a second chance. Yet even when their partnership ended, the foundation of love and grace Barnabas laid in Paul's life remained unbroken. Paul defied every spiritual, social, and cultural obstacle stacked against him because someone loved him when he was at his worst.

Defying Gravity Through Love

"Defying gravity" in our own lives depends on these foundational experiences of love. Until we personally experience God's grace - and the tangible, hands-on love of others—healing and spiritual transformation remain mere aspirational concepts. Experiential love, both divine and human, is the only force capable of redeeming the broken, damaged parts of our history.

Whether you identify today with **Glinda**, searching for deeper purpose beneath a polished exterior; **Elphaba**, feeling misunderstood, outcast, or carrying a heavy burden; or **Barnabas**, called to stand beside someone who needs an advocate - the invitation of the Gospel is two-fold:

1. **Where can you offer this kind of love?** Do people feel welcomed, encouraged, and accepted when they step into your presence? Who in your life is waiting for a "Barnabas"—someone to stand with them so they can finally rise above their past and soar?
2. **Where do you need to receive this love?** You cannot give what you do not have. The foundation for all transformation begins with allowing yourself to be loved by God just as you are—without pretense, performance, or perfection.

Take time every day to sit quietly and soak in the reality of God's love for you. Do not hurry past it. Allow the Holy One to enter those hidden places of pain, fear, and self-doubt, and heal you from the inside out.

We are going to take a few moments to meditate through music today from a song by Stephen Iverson called, "Lord God Heal Me." Let these words be your prayer:

Lord God heal me
Heal me O my Lord
That I might fulfill all your plans for me

https://youtu.be/lzGapgJvX1M?list=OLAK5uy_nm7xrz711350i6N1H0_leWbaz52gMOidI

Prayer: Lord God, heal us. Touch the places in our lives that feel beyond repair. Send us people like Barnabas, and make us like Barnabas for others who desperately need to experience your unconditional love through us. May we be so thoroughly rooted in Your unconditional grace that we, too, are changed for good. Amen.