

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

DISCUSS: Draw attention to the picture on **PSG page 116** and ask **Question #1: What are some interesting nicknames you've encountered over the years?**

GUIDE: Direct attention to the author's reference to rebar in **The Bible Meets Life** on **PSG, page 117**. Rebar is steel reinforcement that gives a building its stability and strength.

SAY: "Encouragement is the rebar of unity in the church; it's the strength of character that holds things together below the surface."

Reinforce **The Point** on **PSG page 117: Christ-centered living chooses encouragement, not criticism.**

PRAY: Begin the Bible study with prayer. Ask God to open our eyes to the vital role of encouragement in the body of Christ.

SESSION 4

BARNABAS: ONGOING ENCOURAGEMENT



The Point

Christ-centered living chooses encouragement, not criticism.

The Bible Meets Life

No one likes to go it alone. We want to know someone has our back or is standing with us. We carry out our responsibilities better when someone is encouraging us. In

the Book of Acts, Barnabas was just such an encourager. He modeled for us how we can positively impact others through a Christ-centered lifestyle of encouragement.

The Passages

Acts 4:36-37; 9:26-27; 11:19-26

The Setting

During Pentecost, the Holy Spirit empowered the small band of Christians in Jerusalem. Peter preached a powerful sermon, and about 3,000 people were added to the church. The believers' conduct gained favor with the people, and the church's numbers grew. Jewish authorities arrested Peter and John for healing in Jesus' name and ordered them to stop. Instead, the Christian community proclaimed the gospel boldly. Believers shared what they owned, selling property to help meet one another's needs.

Acts 4:36-37

36 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus by birth, the one the apostles called Barnabas (which is translated Son of Encouragement), **37** sold a field he owned, brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

KEY WORDS: A Levite (4:36)—A descendant of Levi, Jacob and Leah's third son. Levites were the bottom tier of Israel's three orders of priests. They assisted other priests and sang at morning and evening sacrifices.

Use what you have to encourage others.

1 ▶ **Verse 36.** Luke, the inspired writer of Acts, introduced a believer who would become highly significant in the Christian movement. Luke gave no hint of the man's crucial role in the early church. The Hebrew name **Joseph** means "he adds or increases" and would prove to be prophetic. Joseph was a **Levite**; he belonged to the Israelite tribe of Levi, an order of priests who were dedicated assistants in Israel's worship system. He was a Hellenistic Jew who spoke Greek and was influenced by Greek customs and ways.

Joseph was a native of **Cyprus**, an island in the Mediterranean Sea about 60 miles off the coast of Syria. The island had a large population of Jews. We cannot know when Joseph became a Christian, but Luke presents him as a believer. Jesus' apostles had given Joseph the name **Barnabas**, which Luke translated to mean **Son of Encouragement**. The name *Barnabas* is made up of the Aramaic term *bar*, which means "son," and the suffix *nabas*, whose meaning is uncertain. One suggestion is that it means "prophet" or "prophecy" so that the name means "son of prophecy" and designates one who exhorted. Another suggestion is that the name means "son of refreshment."

The Greek word for *encouragement* Luke used for Joseph's nickname has the sense of a cheering and supporting influence, of being an advocate. It can mean "exhortation," "admonition," and "consolation." A form of the term designates the Holy Spirit, One who comes alongside to support and to encourage—in the broadest sense, the Helper. Joseph's apt nickname expressed his consistent character trait of helping others. To do so was part of his nature.

Verse 37. Barnabas owned property. As other believers were doing (see Acts 2:45), he **sold a field he owned**. He **brought**

STUDY THE BIBLE

Acts 4:36-37



10 minutes

SUMMARIZE: Before reading the passage, set the context by summarizing the information in **The Bible Meets Life** and **The Setting** on page 120.

LEADER PACK: Point to **Item 8: Map Overview** to show where these events occurred



READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Acts 4:36-37.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 1** to provide explanation to verses 36-37 that introduce us to Barnabas.

GUIDE: Refer members to **Key Words** on **PSG page 118** to provide information about "**A Levite.**"

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG pages 118-119** to the issue of the stewardship of resources that we see in Barnabas. A good steward understands that:

- *God is the owner.*
- *We have something to offer.*
- *God will provide.*

DISCUSS: Question #2
(PSG, p. 119): **What makes generosity a source of encouragement?**

(Alternate: How did Barnabas's actions in this passage encourage others?)

TRANSITION: "In the next verses we see Barnabas stand up as an advocate for a new convert to the faith—a young man named Saul."

STUDY THE BIBLE

Acts 9:26-27



10 minutes

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Acts 9:26-27.

the total amount of **money** and gave it to the **apostles**. The phrase **laid it at the apostles' feet** was a way of expressing transference of ownership. His doing so indicated that believers' sharing their possessions was organized and the apostles were responsible for distributing funds. Barnabas's generous act was an example of his helping nature. Likely, his exhorting other believers was another example. ◀

Acts 9:26-27

26 When he arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, since they did not believe he was a disciple.

27 Barnabas, however, took him and brought him to the apostles and explained to them how Saul had seen the Lord on the road and that the Lord had talked to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus.

Encourage others by standing with them and being their advocate.

Verse 26. Acts 9:1-9 is the account of Saul's dramatic conversion. Saul immediately began preaching in the city's synagogues, strongly proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God. The Jews took steps to kill Saul, but his followers helped him escape, and he went to Jerusalem (9:10-25).

2 ▶ When Saul reached Jerusalem, **he tried to join the disciples**. That is, he attempted to attach himself to or unite with the community of believers. Understandably, the Jerusalem Christians **were all afraid of him**. They were well aware of his past history of persecuting Christians. Thus, **they did not believe he was a disciple**—a true follower of Christ. For all they knew, his profession that he had become a believer could have been a clever ruse to infiltrate the church's ranks to identify Christians more easily for arrest. They were not about to fall for such a ploy.

Verse 27. At this point, Barnabas became Saul's advocate. Barnabas **took him ... to the apostles**, who served as the

Jerusalem church's leaders. *Took* has the sense of pulling someone aside. The implication may be that Barnabas talked with Saul privately, heard Saul's account of his conversion experience, and accepted it. Convinced of Saul's truthfulness and trustworthiness, Barnabas went with Saul to the church's leaders, at this point likely headed by Peter. If these church leaders put their stamp of approval on Saul, he would be accepted among believers.

During the meeting with the apostles, Barnabas likely stood beside Saul to plead his case (one sense of the word *encourager*). Barnabas recounted Saul's life-changing experience: his seeing a vision of Jesus on the Damascus road, Jesus' words to him, and Saul's bold proclamation of Jesus in Damascus. The phrase **had spoken boldly** translates a Greek word that means "to speak freely, plainly, with authority." **In the name of Jesus** likely has the sense of "on Jesus' behalf" or "in promotion of Jesus" with His authority. Saul openly identified with the risen Jesus and courageously proclaimed Him.

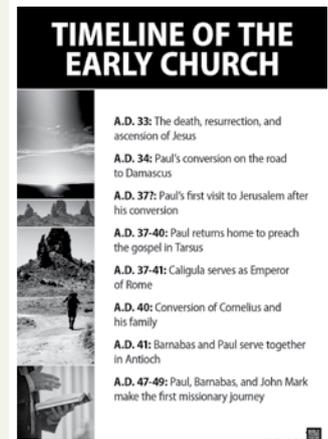
We do a great disservice to the biblical record if we fail to reflect on the monumental significance of Barnabas's being Saul's advocate before the early church's leaders to gain Saul entrance into the Christian community. Two factors were involved: tremendous risk and immeasurable gain. First, Barnabas risked his standing in the church by vouching for Saul. What if Barnabas were wrong, and Saul actually was trying to infiltrate the Christian community with hostile motive? Barnabas would be viewed as a naive, gullible pawn whose judgment could not be trusted. Even more damaging would be his placing other believers in peril. From his side of the equation, he was putting himself "out on a limb" for Saul.

Second, Barnabas's risk resulted in unimaginable gain. He was instrumental in gaining entrance into the Christian movement for a person superbly equipped to become its foremost missionary and the matchless interpreter of Christ. The early church owed Barnabas a debt beyond paying, and believers through the centuries have been his debtors. ◀

Acts 11:19-26

19 Now those who had been scattered as a result of the persecution that started because of Stephen made their way as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews.

LEADER PACK: Point to **Item 10: Timeline** to show the different locations of these events in Barnabas's story.



SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 2** on page 122 and this page to give further explanation to the disciples' response to Saul. Barnabas introduced Saul to the church leaders and told them of Saul's dramatic encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG page 120**. Ask someone to read the paragraph: "But consider how history might have been different if not for the encouraging spirit of Barnabas."

GUIDE: Refer group members to the paragraphs on **PSG page 121** that talk about how powerful it is when someone stands up to serve as an advocate for another person.

DISCUSS: Question #3
(PSG, p. 121): When has someone stood up for you?

(Alternate: What risks do we take when we stand up for others?)

TRANSITION: "Next we will see several ways that Barnabas acted according to his second nature as an encourager.

STUDY THE BIBLE
Acts 11:19-26



15 minutes

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Acts 11:19-26.

GUIDE: Refer members to **Key Word (PSG p. 122)** to provide information about *Greeks*.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 3** on this page and page 125 to describe the persecution of the early church. As believers made their way as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, they shared the gospel with Jews, people like them.

20 But there were some of them, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, proclaiming the good news about the Lord Jesus.

21 The Lord's hand was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.

22 News about them reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to travel as far as Antioch.

23 When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged all of them to remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts,

24 for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And large numbers of people were added to the Lord.

25 Then he went to Tarsus to search for Saul,

26 and when he found him he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught large numbers. The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch.

KEY WORD: Greeks (11:20)—People influenced by Greek thought. It could refer to Jews born outside the holy land who spoke Greek and followed Greek customs, or to "Gentiles." Context dictates the reference—here, Greek speaking Jewish Christians.

Encourage others by helping them grow spiritually.

3 ▶ **Verse 19.** Acts 6:8–8:3 is the account of persecution that arose against early Christians and caused them to be **scattered**. The courageous ministry and testimony of Stephen ignited the persecution. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was stoned to death for his belief in Jesus. A young Saul kept the killers' robes and approved their act. A savage persecution of Christians ensued. As a result, Christians fleeing persecution fanned out over Judea and Samaria, the southern and middle portions of the holy land (7:54–8:3).

The believers who **scattered** because of the persecution Stephen's courageous stand **made their way as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch**. Phoenicia was a narrow

75-mile long strip of land on the Mediterranean seacoast northwest of the Sea of Galilee. The island of Cyprus lay about 100 miles off the coast of Syria. Antioch in Syria was the Roman Empire's third largest city and was located almost 300 miles north of Jerusalem. Hellenized Jews—Jews who spoke Greek and practiced Greek customs and manners—lived in all these locations. Although some of the scattered believers may have been natives of Judea, most were probably Greek-speaking Jewish Christians, so they spoke **the word to no one except Jews** in common or marketplace Greek. The term **word** was used as shorthand for the gospel—the good news of Jesus' coming, servant life, atoning death, and victorious resurrection to provide salvation. The scattered believers proclaimed this good word from God. ◀

4 ▶ Verse 20. The term **but** marks a turning-point in the Christian endeavor. Previously, believers had proclaimed the good news exclusively to Jews. Christians **from Cyprus and Cyrene**, however, **began speaking to the Greeks also**. Cyprus was Barnabas's native home. Cyrene was a city in North Africa. At some point, Christianity had spread to those areas. Greek-speaking Jewish Christians came to **Antioch** in Syria and began to communicate the gospel (**the good news about the Lord Jesus**). They applied the term **Lord** to Jesus because Gentiles would understand it in the sense of Ruler; the word **Christ** (Messiah) would not have been as readily understood. The word **speaking** could have the sense of conversing (talking with) or preaching. Likely, the Christian witnesses did both. Here the word **Greeks** is another term for Gentiles. Thus, the Christian spokesmen crossed the national and racial barriers between Jews and Gentiles. ◀

5 ▶ Verse 21. The Christian witnesses experienced great success because **the Lord's hand was with them**. In the Old Testament, God's hand was used of His activity, the exercise of His power. In Exodus 9:2-3, God told Moses that if Pharaoh would not let the Israelites go, His hand would strike the Egyptians' livestock. Isaiah 59:1 declares God's hand is able to save. In Acts 11:21, the phrase likely conveys the idea of God's approval and power. The result was **a large number of Gentiles made Jesus their Lord** by faith. The term **believed** means "placed faith in" with the strong emphasis of commitment. In the phrase **turned to the Lord**, *Lord* refers to Jesus. Turning to Him involved turning away from worshiping idols and making Jesus Ruler (Master, Sovereign). ◀

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible**

Commentary 4 to explain that at Antioch, those scattered began to share the gospel with Greeks—Gentiles—people unlike them. Point out that:

- *This was a turning point in the Christian endeavor.*
- *They used the phrase "the Lord Jesus," which a Gentile audience would more readily understand, instead of the term "Messiah" that would have connected with Jewish hearers.*
- *They crossed national and racial barriers between Jews and Gentiles.*

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible**

Commentary 5 to explain:

- *The Lord's hand (approval and power) was with them.*
- *A large number who believed turned to the Lord.*

SAY: "When word got back to the church at Jerusalem about the large number of non-Jewish people turning to the Lord, the disciples sent Barnabas to check it out."

GUIDE: Refer members to the paragraph on **PSG page 122** that states:

“Having seen the grace of God at work in these new Gentile believers, Barnabas turned to what was second nature to him: encouragement.”

Ask a volunteer to read aloud:

- Hebrews 3:13
- Hebrews 10:24-25

DISCUSS: Question #4 (PSG, p. 123): **Who has encouraged your spiritual growth over the years?**

GUIDE: Highlight what Barnabas’s example teaches us about encouraging spiritual growth in others (**PSG p. 123**).

- Encourage with joy.
- Encourage with faith.
- Encourage with perseverance

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 6** on this page and page 127 to provide further information about Barnabas’s character and how he encouraged others.

6 ▶ Verse 22. The report of what was taking place in **Antioch** of Syria **reached the church in Jerusalem**. Though severe persecution had scattered Jewish Christians, the Jerusalem church remained the center of authority in the Christian movement. Thus, believers’ activities needed the church’s approval or at least called for its scrutiny.

The Jerusalem church chose **Barnabas** to make the 300-mile trip to Antioch to investigate. The **news** of Gentiles’ becoming believers and members of the Antioch church may have concerned the Jerusalem church’s leaders. The Jerusalem church’s action most likely was not hostile or unfriendly but showed its interest and was meant to relate the two churches.

That Barnabas was chosen to represent the Jerusalem church is significant. The church’s leaders trusted his judgment. He had shown the ability to size up situations with a sense of fairness and a recognition of others’ abilities, as in the case of his championing Saul’s cause in Acts 9. In addition, Barnabas could relate to the Christian witnesses from Cyprus who were working in Antioch.

Verse 23. After his long, arduous journey to Antioch, Barnabas observed the rapid influx of Gentile believers into the community of faith. He perceived what was taking place as **the grace of God**—God’s goodness in action on behalf of Gentiles, His including all people in His offer of salvation through faith in Jesus. Barnabas rejoiced because of what was transpiring. True to his character, he **encouraged** the Gentile converts. He continually urged them to go on remaining faithful **to the Lord** (Jesus). They were not to allow the spiritual glow of conversion to fade into diminished commitment as disciples. The phrase **with devoted hearts** has the idea of determined intent. Barnabas wanted the Gentile converts’ goal to be sustained commitment to Christ and His redemptive purpose.

Verse 24. Luke gave a glowing description of Barnabas and the reason for his conduct: **He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith**. The term *good* has the senses of profitable, generous, upright, and virtuous. Barnabas’s kindness made room for the new and unique work in Antioch. Here, the phrase *full of the Holy Spirit* likely referred to Barnabas’s having a number of spiritual gifts, as Stephen had (see Acts 6:5). The phrase also could have the idea of the Spirit’s presence to inspire. Barnabas was characterized by a strong trust in and faithfulness to his Lord. Luke reported that

large numbers of people were added to the Lord as they made genuine faith commitments to Jesus. ◀

7 ▶ **Verse 25.** With dramatic brevity Luke recorded one of the most significant events in the Christian enterprise (six words in the Greek text). The rapidly growing influx of new believers in Antioch required someone to help, so Barnabas **went to Tarsus to search for Saul**. A number of years had elapsed since Barnabas had vouched for Saul and gained him fellowship with the Jerusalem believers. Saul had returned to his hometown of Tarsus, to the northwest of Antioch and not far away. The Greek word for *search* means “to hunt up” and includes the element of difficulty.

Verse 26. Barnabas’s thorough search for Saul was successful. He **found** Saul and took him back to Antioch. The two men worked in tandem **for a whole year**, during which time they **taught large numbers** of converts being brought into **the church**. Teaching the basic truths and principles of following Jesus would be necessary because of the Gentile converts’ pagan backgrounds. Although the Greek word for *taught* is different from the one for “preached,” some interpreters suggest Barnabas and Saul engaged in evangelism as well as teaching. Barnabas again acted as Saul’s encourager, opening a door of significant service.

To this point in the Christian movement, believers were often called “people of the Way.” In referring to one another they used terms such as “brothers,” “disciples,” and “saints.” **At Antioch**, they were given a new name: **Christians**. That they were called Christians probably meant others gave them that name. The word *Christian* means “belonging to the party of” Christ, a Christ-follower. Likely, the Gentile population in Antioch began calling the Gentile followers of Jesus *Christians*. They may have done so to distinguish between Jews and Jesus’ followers. One suggestion is that *Christians* was a nickname that expressed mockery and contempt. On the other hand, believers’ lives may have reflected their Lord’s character and teachings to the extent they became known as being like Him.

Encouragement may be the most underrated and least appreciated of the spiritual gifts. In Romans 12:8, Paul urged believers with the gift of exhortation to exercise their gift. Behind the term *exhortation* is the Greek word that can be translated “encouragement.” It has the sense of supporting, strengthening—of helping believers advance in the faith. In a real sense, every believer can be an encourager. ◀

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible**

Commentary 7 to provide more information about Barnabas’s influence in the life of Saul:

- *Barnabas went to Tarsus to search for Saul*
- *He found Saul and brought him back to Antioch*
- *For a whole year Barnabas and Saul taught a large number of new converts*
- *Disciples were first called Christians at Antioch*

DISCUSS: **Question #5**

(PSG, p. 124): How can you use your resources, gifts, skills, or talents to encourage others?

(Alternate: Why is encouragement a necessary element in the church?)

DO: Encourage group members to take a few minutes to complete the activity **“Becoming Like Baranabas”** on **PSG page 124**.

LIVE IT OUT**5 minutes**

GUIDE: Emphasize **The Point:**
Christ-centered living chooses encouragement, not criticism.

REVIEW: Review **Live It Out (PSG, p. 125)**; (see text to the right). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

WRAP IT UP

GUIDE: Emphasize that encouragement was second nature for Barnabas. To be an encourager was what he did; it was who he was. We can learn from his example: we can become encouragers to those who need an advocate, to those who need someone to cheer them on.

PRAY: "Father, help us to be sensitive to people we encounter who need an encouraging word from us."

LIVE IT OUT

You are who you are because someone was willing to encourage you. That person, along with many others, form the "rebar" of your life—the support and structure that makes you stable. What will you do to offer the same support to others?

- ▶ **Encourage friends.** Think of the people who are closest to you right now. What is one specific sentence you can say to each of them to encourage them?
- ▶ **Encourage your pastor.** Your pastor might be someone you don't consider when you think of encouraging someone. Take time this week to do so.
- ▶ **Encourage others in your community.** Part of encouragement is being willing to stand up for those who can't stand up for themselves. As a group, identify those people in your community and plan some actions you can do to stand up for them.



BIBLICAL
ILLUSTRATOR



Greek Orthodox church on the island of Paphos. In the foreground are the remains of an ancient Jewish synagogue and what has been named "Paul's Pillar."

The apostles defined Barnabas's role in the ministry of the early church by paying him a high compliment—his nickname, which meant "Son of Encouragement" (see Acts 4:36). Barnabas excelled at encouraging and admonishing others.

Barnabas was from Cyprus and he descended from the tribe of Levi. The priests of Israel came from this tribe. Not all Levites served as priests; some served in the temple, as scribes, or teachers of the Law. Barnabas was a Jew of the *Diaspora*, one of those who

were scattered from the land of promise into other parts of the world. As early as 330 BC, a colony of Jews lived on Cyprus.

Luke described Barnabas as "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith" (11:24); a prophet and teacher (13:1); an apostle (14:14); and one through whom God had worked miracles (15:12).

Some Jewish and Greek believers had scattered after Stephen's martyrdom and had made their way to Antioch of Syria (11:19). Their witness resulted in a spiritually vibrant congregation in Antioch. The church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch to check out the happenings there. When Barnabas saw the need for teachers for these new believers, he searched for Saul. For a year, the two men "met with the church and taught large numbers" (v. 26). Their ministry in Antioch gave rise to a new name for believers, "Christians" (v. 26).

The excerpt above is from the article "Barnabas and the Early Church" (Spring 2016), which relates to this session. More *Biblical Illustrator* articles are available that relate to this session. See page 7 about *Biblical Illustrator*.

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

Believers in the church at Antioch shared the good news of Jesus with all people.

We are to share the gospel so that everyone has the opportunity to know God's grace and forgiveness.

Each week, make yourself available either before or after the session to speak privately with anyone in your group who wants to know more about becoming a Christian. See the article, "Leading Someone to the Greatest Decision of All," on page 2 for guidance in leading a person to Christ.

Remind group members that **page 2** in the **PSG** offers guidance in how to become a Christian. Encourage believers to consider using this article as they have opportunities to lead others to Christ.