



SESSION 4

BARNABAS: ONGOING ENCOURAGEMENT

The Point

Christ-centered living chooses encouragement, not criticism.

The Passage

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

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 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.

What does the Bible say?

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

A Levite (4:36)—A Levite was 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.

Greeks (11:20)—This term referred to 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. In this context, the term refers to Greek-speaking Jewish Christians.

^{4:36} **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.**

^{9:26} **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.**

^{11:19} **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.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.**

GET INTO THE STUDY



10 minutes

Notes



DISCUSS: Invite your group members to discuss **Question #1** on page 91 of the PSG (Personal Study Guide): **“What are some interesting nicknames you’ve encountered?”** Allow time for each person to respond.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, purchase a small piece of inexpensive steel rebar at a home improvement store. Display this rebar as you discuss the next paragraph.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 92): No one views a skyscraper in its early stages and marvels at the extensive nature of its rebar. We don’t want to see what makes it stable. We want to see what makes it pretty. Even though rebar isn’t pretty, it’s incredibly necessary. It’s what gives a building its stability and strength. It’s what holds everything together below the surface.

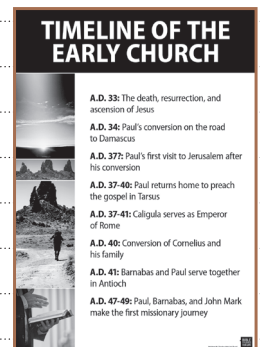
We’ve all had people who have supported us in our faith even when it felt like the whole world was being turned upside down. It’s easier to drift down the road of criticism. The Christian, though, must resist that temptation. We must choose to build up instead of tear down.

GUIDE: Call attention to **The Point** on page 92 of the PSG: **“Christ-centered living chooses encouragement, not criticism.”**

PRAY: Transition into the discussion with prayer. Thank God for equipping us with all we need to encourage others and for the opportunities we have to do so.

LEADER PACK: Bring your group’s attention to **Pack Item #10**, “Timeline of the Early Church” poster to provide some context for your group members on the different events that led up to Barnabas and Paul meeting and ministering together.

TIP: Always be prepared for guests by having plenty of chairs and extra copies of the *Personal Study Guide* in your meeting space. These actions communicate that you expect and welcome guests.

**PACK POSTER:****Pack Item #8****“People and Places” poster****Pack Item #10****“Timeline of the Early Church” poster****PLAYLIST PICK:****“Brother”****By NEEDTOBREATHE**



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

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.*

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Acts 4:36-37.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 93): The first few chapters of the Book of Acts provide a beautiful glimpse into the early days of the church. Among those new believers was a man named Joseph. Apparently, this man was so gifted and willing with his encouragement of others that he soon earned a nickname—Barnabas—that literally means “Son of Encouragement.” Barnabas was a man of means who went so far as to sell one of the fields he owned and bring the money to the apostles for the mutual good of God’s people.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 93): Like Barnabas, we too have been given resources—talents, time, or finances—and we have to choose what to do with them. For us, as it was with Barnabas, our willingness to use what we have for others will be driven by our faith. We must fully believe some things to be true if we are willing to give generously what we have to encourage others:

- » **God is the owner.** God entrusts us with whatever we have, be it small or great. And He does this so that we can use those resources for the expansion of His kingdom.
- » **We have something to offer.** We always have something to offer to another, not because we are wealthy in resources, but because of our God who has given us what we need for that purpose.
- » **God will provide.** When we trust in God’s provision for our own needs, we’re free to encourage others with what we have.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

How did Barnabas’s actions in this passage encourage others?

DISCUSS: Question 2 on page 93 of the PSG: “**What makes generosity a source of encouragement?**”

TRANSITION: Barnabas was generous with his finances; in the next passage we find Barnabas demonstrated encouragement in another important way.

Acts 4:36-37 Commentary

Use what you have to encourage others. Verse 36: Luke, the inspired writer of Acts, introduced a believer who would become highly significant in the Christian movement. The physician/historian 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. At a young age, Joseph may have moved to Jerusalem with his family. We cannot know when or how Joseph became a Christian, but Luke's narrative 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 preached or 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. Probably, Joseph's apt nickname expressed his consistent character trait or disposition of helping others. To do so was part of his nature.

Verse 37: In the Old Testament, Levites were not allowed to own land. Over the years, evidently that prohibition had lapsed. Either on Cyprus or in the land bridge of which the holy land was a part, Barnabas owned property. As other believers were doing (see Acts 2:45), he "sold a field he owned." He brought 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.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

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.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Acts 9:26-27.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 94): Opposition to the early Christians arose under the leadership of a man named Saul, a Pharisee of Pharisees.

- » Saul obsessively began to root out these pockets of Jesus-followers, seizing them and, in some cases, putting them to death (Acts 9:1-2).
- » On the road to Damascus, Saul came face to face with the risen Jesus where he was dramatically and irreversibly changed. Saul, the great persecutor, became the great missionary.
- » These early believers knew about Saul; they had seen what he had done to their brothers and sisters. When a rumor circulated that Saul had completely changed course—he was now with them instead of against them—surely many thought this supposed conversion was just another trick.
- » Barnabas, the encourager, was willing to take a chance on Saul. Convinced of the power of the gospel, Barnabas was willing to stand up for him.

DISCUSS: Question 3 on page 94 of the PSG: “What risks do we take when we stand up for others?”

SAY: “The spread of the gospel message and the growth of the early church might have been different if not for the encouraging spirit of Barnabas.”

LEADER PACK: Bring your group’s attention to **Pack Item #8**, “People and Places” poster. Identify Jerusalem and Antioch. Antioch is where Barnabas and Saul would soon preach the gospel message to Gentiles as well as Jews.

DISCUSS: Question 4 on page 95 of the PSG: “Why is encouragement a necessary element in the church?”



ALTERNATE QUESTION:

Who has been an encourager in your life?

Acts 9:26-27 Commentary

Encourage others by standing with them and being their advocate. Verse 26: Acts 9:1-9 is the account of Saul's dramatic conversion. On Saul's way to Damascus to find Christians to take as prisoners to Jerusalem, he encountered the risen Jesus. Saul obeyed the Lord's directive, entered Damascus, received Ananias's ministry, and was baptized. Saul 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). When Saul reached Jerusalem, "he tried to join the disciples" 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, this was a clever ruse to infiltrate the church's ranks to identify Christians more easily for arrest. The story of his about-face from rabid persecutor to fellow believer was more than suspect to them.

Verse 27: At this point, Barnabas became Saul's advocate. No doubt, Barnabas had watched Saul's attempt to attach himself to the Christian community in Jerusalem. Barnabas "took him ... to the apostles," the twelve close followers of Jesus 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. If these 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 and his 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 pause and 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 have ushered "the fox into the henhouse." 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.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

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. 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.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Acts 11:19-26.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGES 95-96): It was always God's intent that the gospel spread beyond Jerusalem and the Jewish population there (Matthew 28:19). Yet when the gospel began to be preached to the Greeks, a group of people the Jews considered out of bounds, many Jewish believers were skeptical. Having seen the grace of God at work in these new Gentile believers, Barnabas encouraged these new believers to grow spiritually.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

Who has encouraged your spiritual growth over the years?

DISCUSS: Question 5 on page 96 of the PSG: "How can you use your resources, skills, or talents to encourage others?"

DO: Place group members into subgroups of three or four people each. Invite subgroups to complete the activity on page 97 of the PSG together.



BUILD UP: A friend recently learned the job offer he was counting on was given to another applicant. He's been job hunting for some time and has recently commented that God must not care or be able to meet his need for employment.

- » What steps can you take to offer encouragement?
- » What kind of encouragement can this Bible study group offer?

Acts 11:19-26 Commentary

Encourage others by helping them grow spiritually. Verses 19-20: Believers were scattered because of persecution and “made their way as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch.” Antioch in Syria was the Roman Empire’s third largest city, almost 300 miles north of Jerusalem. Hellenized Jews—Jews who spoke Greek and practiced Greek customs and manners—lived there. Most of the scattered believers were probably Greek-speaking Jewish Christians, so they spoke the word “to no one except Jews” in readily understood common or marketplace Greek. The term “word” was shorthand for the gospel—the good news of Jesus’ life, atoning death, and victorious resurrection to provide salvation. The scattered believers proclaimed this good word.

The term “but” marks a turning-point in the Christian enterprise. Previously, believers had proclaimed the good news exclusively to Jews. Christians from Cyprus and Cyrene, however, “began speaking to the Greeks also.” They began to communicate the good news about the Lord Jesus. Here “Greeks” is another term for Gentiles. Thus, the Christian spokesmen crossed the national and racial barriers between Jews and Gentiles.

Verses 21-24: The Christian witnesses experienced great success because “the Lord’s hand was with them.” The result was a large number of Gentiles made Jesus their Lord by faith. Turning to Him involved turning away from worshiping idols and making Jesus Ruler (Master, Sovereign). The report of what was taking place in Antioch of Syria reached the church in Jerusalem which remained the center of authority in the Christian movement.

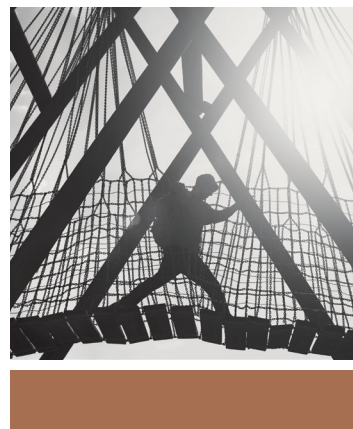
The Jerusalem church chose Barnabas to go investigate. Most likely, the Jerusalem church’s action was not hostile or unfriendly but showed its interest and was meant to relate the two churches. True to character, he encouraged the Gentile converts. He continually urged them to go on remaining faithful to the Lord (Jesus). With few words, 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.” Luke reported that “large numbers of people were added to the Lord” as they made genuine faith commitments to Jesus.

Verses 25-26: With dramatic brevity Luke recorded one of the most significant events in the Christian enterprise (six words in the Greek text). The rapidly growing church 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. Barnabas found Saul and took him back to Antioch. The two worked in tandem for a whole year, during which time they “taught large numbers” of converts being brought into the church.



Notes

GUIDE: Lead group members to consider the responses to the Bible study listed on page 98 of the PSG.



- » **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.

Wrap It Up

SAY: “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 this same support to others?**”



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