

2 | Encourage



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

We've been encouraged since we were kids to take our vitamins. And so we do. Since the 1940s, Americans have been popping multivitamins in their mouths every day. We know we need these important vitamins and minerals.

A daily dose is good for us.

We could use a “daily dose” of something else too. Let's call it a spiritual and emotional vitamin: the vitamin of encouragement. We were created to live in relationship with others, and we hunger for the affirmation of others. We need a healthy supply of encouragement from others in order to grow as God intends. Unfortunately, too many of us face a deficiency in this area. Our lives can grow weak without encouragement. And so can our relationships.

Barnabas was a natural encourager. His life challenges us to be a source of encouragement to others. We support the other person and strengthen our relationship when we look for ways to offer encouragement.

GROUP TIME

THE POINT: Encouragement strengthens _____ .

My four children were shooting hoops in the driveway when they asked good ol' dad to supply some pointers on proper form. I racked my brain to remember junior high drills as I gave my best lecture on the mechanics of a free throw. Following my two-minute speech, those four kids stood staring blankly at me. My daughter assumed the role of spokesperson: "Could you, like, show us what you're talking about, Dad?" When I turned and took a shot, their confusion vanished and the game resumed.

Most times, the simplest way to learn is to watch someone. As the old adage goes: Some things are more caught than taught. And Barnabas is someone worth watching. By his example, he showed us three ways we can encourage others.

Acts 9:26-28 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.** ²⁸ **Saul was coming and going with them in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.**

Encourage _____ .

In Acts 9, God used Barnabas to bring Saul to a place of prominence. The apostles may not have rejected Saul outright, but they certainly kept their distance. Based on his past record, Saul wasn't the kind of person a Christian would want to be around. Christians were known to end up in trouble—or dead—when Saul came around (Acts 26:9-11).

- ▶ Even though Saul's heart had been changed completely after he had a personal encounter with Jesus, the believers in Jerusalem didn't dare trust him.
- ▶ Barnabas, however, saw Saul as a man truly changed by the shed blood of Christ. Therefore, Barnabas stuck his neck out and vouched for Saul. He encouraged the apostles and believers to reconsider their skepticism and to take a risk on this guy.
- ▶ The disciples may not have trusted Saul just yet, but they did trust Barnabas; so they opened the door and their hearts to Saul, and he soon became a dominant force in spreading the gospel.

Acts 11:21-24 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.

Encourage _____ .

In Acts 11, Barnabas returned to the stage. This time, he was commissioned by the apostles in Jerusalem to travel 300 miles north to Antioch. Many Jews in Antioch embraced Christianity, and the believers had begun to spread the message to Gentiles as well. As a result, Greeks in the region were coming to faith in Christ. When the apostles got wind of the astonishing harvest, they sent Barnabas to assess the situation and to report what God had done.

As soon as Barnabas saw what God was doing, "he was glad and encouraged all of them to remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts" (v. 23). Barnabas surely strengthened these new saints enormously as he drove home the power of perseverance. The future would require resolve, as persecution and famine would challenge the church.

Acts 11:25-26 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.

Encourage _____ .

We don't know what Barnabas said to Saul, but as the church in Antioch began to blossom, Barnabas went to fetch Saul from Tarsus. He brought Saul to Antioch to serve, to do what God had gifted him to do. "For a whole year they met with the church and taught large numbers" (v. 26). Revival was evident as Saul and Barnabas rightly leveraged life-giving words. Saul served because he was obedient to the call of God and Barnabas encouraged him in his work.

WHO CAN I ENCOURAGE?

We all have people in our lives who need encouragement. Record names of people you know who match each of these criteria:

Someone in your family who you can encourage each day: _____

Someone in your church who you can encourage each week: _____

Someone from your past who could use encouragement: _____

LIVE IT OUT

How can you strengthen your relationships through encouragement?

- ▶ **Express thanks.** Express thanks to someone who has been an encouragement to you. Be specific regarding how that person's words or actions helped you.
- ▶ **Evaluate your life.** Consider whether people are encouraged by your example or actions. Consider what you might need to change to be an encourager like Barnabas.
- ▶ **Encourage each other.** Share ways each person in your Bible study group lives out one or more of the character traits in the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

TALK IT OUT

Want to go a step further? Gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender. Read Acts 9:26-28; 11:21-26, then use the following summary and questions for a deeper discussion.

It's good to know when someone has our back or is standing with us. No soldier wants to go into battle alone, and none of us likes to stand up and be the lone voice in a meeting. There's great encouragement when someone is standing with us. We all need encouragers in our lives. In turn, we can strengthen our relationships when we offer the same support and encouragement to others.

Why is encouragement so vital to the church?

When has encouragement played a pivotal role in your life?

Who is God calling you to encourage?

DAY 1: God uses our encouragement in big and small circumstances.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:11.

Barnabas first popped up in Scripture as Joseph of Cyprus (Acts 4:36). The apostles had given him the nickname “Barnabas,” which means “Son of Encouragement.” Apparently, this man had developed a sterling reputation of building others up with loving words, generous acts, and even affirming looks. When people in the early church thought of an encourager, they thought of Barnabas, and the nickname stuck.

Barnabas noticed people and made the effort to invest in them. He left a significant mark on others’ lives, and we can too. Is someone in your life starving for encouragement? Can you think of a person “on the fringe” that could use an invitation into your circle of influence? You may never know the difference you make in another’s life when you simply extend the hand of fellowship and invite him or her into your world.

Identify several areas of your life where you have the opportunity to meet and get to know people (such as your workplace, gym, and neighborhood). List those below and ask God to open your eyes to see when and how you can encourage others.

“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you are already doing.”

1 THESSALONIANS 5:11

DAY 2: God can use our encouragement for His kingdom.

Read Acts 9:26-28.

Imagine how different your faith would be if Saul had been rejected by the disciples! Had Barnabas taken the easy road, cowering in fear and refusing to endorse Saul, a large section of the New Testament wouldn't exist. Saul would become Paul, the great apostle who was called by God to carry the gospel to the Gentiles and was inspired by God to write fourteen of the books in the New Testament. Without Paul, the second half of Acts simply falls off into the sea. Through this man, the missionary zeal of the church was produced. Through the ministry of this one man, the gospel of Christ made it to Rome and western civilization.

Do you think Barnabas had any hint of the magnitude of Saul's soon-to-be ministry? It's possible, but it doesn't seem likely. When he sniffed potential in somebody, Barnabas pulled that person up and encouraged him in Jesus. Without Barnabas, it's likely that Saul would have remained only a small bud in the blossoming ministry of the church. But God used an encourager to help Paul's ministry flower into greatness.

Choose a friend or family member and let him or her know that you've seen his or her contribution to God's kingdom.

DAY 3: God uses our encouragement in relationships.

Read Acts 11:21-24.

When I was fresh out of college, I was sure I knew it all. That diploma on the wall was a regular reminder that I had arrived. What I didn't realize at the time, however, is that maturity takes place over time. Knowledge must be accompanied by experience, and we will find no short cuts to growth. Like those untested disciples in Antioch, I was unaware of the tests and challenges that were soon to come. Soon after graduation came grief from a broken engagement, life-changing illnesses that affected my family, and waves of doubt as I struggled to discern God's will. My journey involved many unforeseen detours.

Kent came into my life and breathed fresh wind into my sails. He was a middle-aged man, mature in Christ, and growing by leaps and bounds. Kent took an interest in me and intentionally invested his life into mine. Once a week, we met for coffee and confession. He drank coffee; I confessed. He stood with me and challenged me to be stouthearted even in my struggle. It's hard to imagine where I would be today had the Lord held back my "Barnabas."

Who might you encourage in the faith? Ask God for wisdom and leadership to spur on someone else who may be struggling right now.

DAY 4: God uses our encouragement to spur on others' spiritual growth.

Read Hebrews 10:23-24.

- ▶ “Wow, you’re really gifted with kids!”
- ▶ “You made my week with that beautiful song!”
- ▶ “How did you learn to teach the Bible so well?”
- ▶ “My college student can’t wait to walk in and talk to you each week!”
- ▶ “You make the most delicious desserts. If you charged a fee, I would pay.”
- ▶ “Your home feels so warm when we arrive each week. Thanks for preparing the space and making us feel so welcomed.”

These little statements may not sound like much, but over time, a plant grows tall through regular watering—and a believer grows strong through regular encouraging. The church of Jesus Christ should be the most encouraging place on earth. Homes committed to Christ should be greenhouses of growth for young children coming up in them. Good words encourage growth. And they should encourage others to step up and serve.

*Express thanks to someone who has been a spiritual encouragement to you.
Be specific regarding how their words or actions helped you.*



DAY 5: God uses our encouragement to meet the needs of His people.

Read Acts 11:25-26.

When Barnabas found Saul and led him to Antioch, he was leading Saul into the great mission of his life—sharing Christ with the Gentile world. Barnabas and Saul invested a whole year in teaching new believers. They recognized that God calls people not only to faith in Christ, but also to discipleship. Their example challenges us to be intentional about investing the time needed to prepare new Christians to live and serve effectively.

Barnabas's encouragement produced very practical results. The next event described in the Book of Acts (11:27-30) is the prediction of a famine throughout the Roman world, a disaster that would put many Christians, especially those with few financial resources, in danger of hunger or even starvation. The church at Antioch responded to this need by giving, as each was able, to provide support for hungry Christians in Judea. Barnabas and Saul served as the messengers of this love in action. Christians in Antioch now gave Christian brothers and sisters in need the same gift of encouragement they had received from Barnabas.

Volunteer to meet a need within your church. Take the opportunity to offer fresh energy and encouragement to accomplish the task God has given your church.

"I used to think you had to be special for God to use you, but now I know you simply need to say yes."

BOB GOFF