

## SESSION 2

# Encourage



### **QUESTION 1:**

*Who has been the most encouraging person in your life?*

## THE POINT

Encouragement strengthens relationships.

## THE PASSAGES

Acts 9:26-28; 11:21-26

## 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, and even though a healthy diet is likely to give us all we need, half of us go the extra step and buy multivitamins or supplements.<sup>1</sup>

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.

Just ask any athlete about the benefit they gain when they have the “home field advantage.” Encouragement gives us a boost. 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.

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## 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.

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. We'll let him serve as our encouragement coach, because by his example, he showed us three ways we can encourage others.

### **Encourage Acceptance.**

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.

## DIGGING DEEPER

### **BARNABAS: ALL WE KNOW**

When Barnabas first appears in Acts, he sold a field and gave the profit to the church (4:36-37). Barnabas served the Jerusalem church when they needed information about the events in Antioch (11:21-24). Barnabas carried a love offering from Antioch to Jerusalem (vv. 27-30). The church in Antioch commissioned him and Saul by the guidance of the Holy Spirit to take the gospel to other people (13:1-4). When facing the Jerusalem Council concerning the issue of Gentiles coming to faith in Christ, Barnabas supported Paul by contending that God saved Gentiles without them having to undergo circumcision (Acts 15).

Barnabas intervened on behalf of Saul when he needed an introduction to the leadership in Jerusalem (9:26-28). Later, he found Saul, who was in Tarsus, and brought him to Antioch to help teach (11:25-26). He teamed with Paul on the first missionary journey and sailed to his homeland of Cyprus.

Later, preparing for the second missionary journey, Barnabas argued that John Mark should accompany Paul and himself on the trip—even though Mark had returned home early during the first missionary journey (Acts 13:13). Paul adamantly refused to take John Mark. Barnabas so cared for John Mark that he split with Paul and took John Mark with him to Cyprus (vv. 36-39).

Roy E Lucas, Jr. "Barnabas: All We Know," *Biblical Illustrator*, Fall 2012, 24-27.

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 was not 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 (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, realized Saul was a changed man. He 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 to reconsider their skepticism and to take a risk on

this guy. The disciples may not have trusted Saul, 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.

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 would not 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 thirteen 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. Barnabas was likely just doing what he had always done: helping a fellow believer to take the next step in his spiritual growth. When he sniffed potential in somebody, he 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.

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.

#### QUESTION 2:

*What risks do you take when you put yourself on the line for an outsider?*

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## **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.

Barnabas encouraged believers to grow spiritually. 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.

Because of persecution, believers had scattered, so that the kingdom of God advanced wherever they went. So 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.” Barnabas strengthened these new saints as he drove home the power of perseverance. While the believers surely welcomed his words and received them with joy, the future would require resolve, as the church would be challenged by persecution and famine. To be a Christian was to accept the road of suffering, but it was a journey they could make with joy. Barnabas did more than pay lip service to the joy of knowing Jesus; he embodied it. His message and his conduct were in sync: “for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.”

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.

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. Every Christian could tell of similar experiences, but herein lies the power of the encourager. As faith begins to falter and growth comes to a standstill, God can send along an encourager to rekindle our passion. God sends "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith."

Kent came into my life and breathed fresh wind into my sails. Kent was a middle-aged man, mature in Christ, and growing by leaps and bounds. He 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. With love and loyalty, 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. Kent was a great encouragement to me.

Perhaps you are in a season when you are starving for a good word from a friend. Do you have someone who breathes fresh wind into your sails, who sees your potential and pushes you to grow? If not, pray that the Lord would bring that person into your life. Conversely, be that person in someone else's life. Is there a person in your life who seems to be sinking or withering? Be a Barnabas and begin the process of investing in another person.

### QUESTION 3:

*How can we intentionally grow into the role of an encourager?*

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## 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 Service.

- ▶ “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?”
- ▶ “Have you ever thought about leading a small group of your own? When you speak, people listen.”
- ▶ “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.

As the church in Antioch began to blossom, Barnabas went to fetch Saul from Tarsus. We don’t know what Barnabas said to Saul, but He brought Saul to Antioch to serve, to do what God had gifted him to do.

#### QUESTION 4:

***What is our responsibility toward someone who has faded from view?***



At one time, Barnabas had served as a mentor to Saul, “watering” him with encouragement and watching him grow up in the faith. Now Saul had developed to the point of being Barnabas’s peer in ministry, so that the two became a formidable force for discipleship. “For a whole year they met with the church and taught large numbers.” 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.

Barnabas encouraged Saul’s ministry and teaching through his actions: he served alongside Saul. Our own actions and examples can be great encouragements for others to step up and use the gifts and skills God has given them. Barnabas lived out the charge in Hebrews 10:24: “And let us watch out for one another to provoke love and good works.” Be encouraged to follow his example and do the same.

**QUESTION 5:**

*How can we actively encourage God’s larger work in our church?*

**ENGAGE**

*Whom do you know that could really use some encouraging words from you right about now? What could you tell them to make a difference in their day?*

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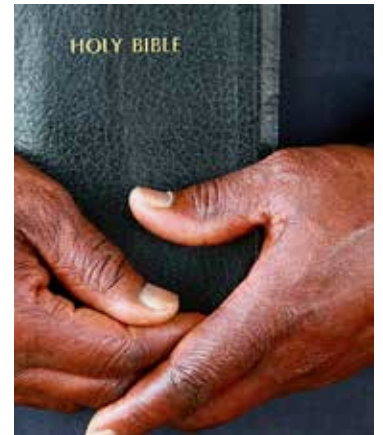
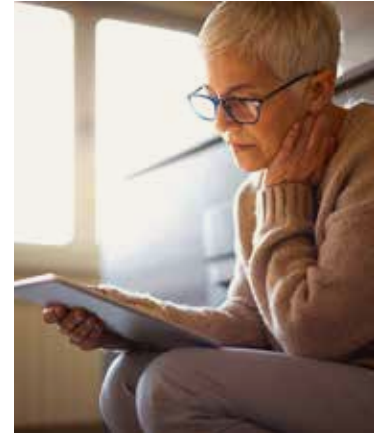
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## LIVE IT OUT

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 their 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 the group lives out one or more of the character traits in the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).



### END NOTES

1R. L. Bailey et al, "Dietary supplement use in the United States," *National Center for Biotechnology Information*, December 22, 2010, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21178089?dopt=Abstract>.