

Session 2: Encourage

QUESTION 1:

When have you recently seen encouragement in action?

HELLO
BEAUTIFUL

THE POINT

Encouragement strengthens relationships.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

We've been encouraged since we were kids to take our vitamins. And so we do. We know we need them, 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.

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.

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.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

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.

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. In this session, he showed three ways to 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 and generous acts.

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. 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 (Acts 26:9-11). Even though Saul’s heart had been changed completely after an 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 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.

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 fourteen of the books in the New Testament.

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? 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 endorse an outsider?

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 growth.

Barnabas encouraged believers to accept another believer, and he also 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.

Examine the beautiful picture Luke, the writer of Acts, painted of Barnabas's ministry. 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 surely drove home the power of perseverance. To be a Christian was to accept the road of suffering, but it was a journey they could make with joy.

Barnabas embodied what it meant to know Christ. 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 thought I knew it all. I didn't realize, however, that knowledge must be accompanied by experience; there are no short cuts to growth.

Like those untested disciples in Antioch, I was unaware of the challenges that were soon to come. My journey involved many detours. But herein lies the power of the encourager. As faith begins to falter, 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. He took an interest in me and intentionally invested his life into mine.

Perhaps you are in a season when you are starving for a good word from a friend. Do you have someone who sees your potential and pushes you to grow? If not, begin praying that the Lord would bring that person into your life. Conversely, be that kind of person in someone else's life. Is there a person in your life who seems to be sinking? 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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*“Within the 24-hour cycle
of our lives, we all owe a debt
to each other for
the gift of encouragement.”*

EARL F. PALMER

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B I B L E S T U D I E S F O R T H E

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?” “My college student can’t wait to walk in and talk to you each week!” “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.”

Has anyone ever said things like this to you? 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.

QUESTION 4:

What might hold us back from offering encouragement to others?

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.

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. “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.

QUESTION 5:

How can we actively encourage others to serve in the church?

But Barnabas did not just use words to encourage Saul’s ministry. He also encouraged through his actions: he served alongside Saul. Our own actions can be great encouragements to 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.

SOCIAL MEDIA ENCOURAGEMENT

Social media is a powerful force for both encouragement and discouragement.

Use the scale from 1 to 5, with 1 as most and 5 as least, to rank the items of encouragement/discouragement from social media.

Things on social media that encourage me:

- _____ God-centered content
- _____ Kind comments
- _____ Images of beauty
- _____ Lots of likes
- _____ Positive news stories

Things on social media that discourage me:

- _____ Passive aggressive posts
- _____ Drama
- _____ Oversharing
- _____ FOMO (fear of missing out)
- _____ Tragic news

How can you leverage your social media presence to encourage people?

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 his or her 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 (Galatians 5:22-23).

As we have received encouragement, we should offer the same support to someone else. **Our relationships will be strengthened when we open our hearts this way.**
