

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

SAY: “In our last session, we looked at Ruth and her all-in commitment. Today we will look at Barnabas and his ongoing encouragement.” Invite members to turn to **page 3** in the **Personal Study Guide (PSG)** and review session titles.

OPTION: IN ADVANCE, attach a large sheet of paper to a focal wall. On the paper write “Words of Encouragement.” As participants arrive, provide markers and instruct them to write phrases of encouragement on the paper. You’ll have an opportunity at the end of the session to read their comments aloud.

DISCUSS: Draw attention to the picture (**PSG, p. 116**) as you introduce **Question #1: What are some interesting nicknames you’ve encountered over the years?**

NOTE: You may want to have a little fun with members as they attempt to connect the image to the nickname: **Ice-T!**

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 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,

37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

KEY WORD:

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. The physician/historian gave no hint of the man's crucial role in the early church. The Hebrew name **Joses** (Joseph) means "he adds or increases"; this would prove to be prophetic. Joses was **a Levite**; he belonged to the Jewish 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.

Joses was **of the country of Cyprus**, an island in the Mediterranean Sea about sixty miles off the coast of Syria. The island had a large population of Jews. At a young age, Joses may have moved to Jerusalem with his family. We cannot know when or how Joses became a Christian, but Luke's narrative presents him as a believer. **By the apostles** Joses was **surnamed Barnabas**, which Luke translated to mean **The son of consolation**.

The Greek word for *consolation* has the sense of a cheering and supporting influence, of being an advocate. It can mean "exhortation," "admonition," and "encouragement." 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, Joses'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 that made up

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Bible Meets Life (PSG, p. 117)**. Highlight the author's illustration of rebar, and how, although it isn't the pretty part of a building or one that people want to see, it's a vitally important part that gives support and stability to tall buildings.

Reinforce the importance of supporting and encouraging by reading **The Point** on page 120 (**PSG, p. 117**): **Christ-centered living chooses encouragement, not criticism.**

PRAY: Ask for a spirit that uplifts others. Thank Him for the example of Barnabas's ongoing encouragement.

STUDY THE BIBLE Acts 4:36-37



10 minutes

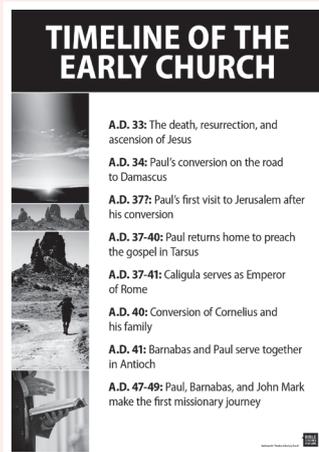
GUIDE: Before reading the passage, set the context by summarizing the information in **The Setting** on page 120.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read Acts 4:36-37.

LEADER PACK: Direct the group’s attention to **Item 8: People & Places** to give context for Antioch’s location.



LEADER PACK: Direct the group’s attention to **Item 10: Timeline of the Early Church** as you teach this session. Use this visual to highlight Barnabas’s contribution to the growth of the early church.



part of the holy land, Barnabas owned property. As other believers were doing (see Acts 2:45), he **sold** some **land** he owned. He **brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet**. The phrase rendered *laid it at the apostles’ feet* was a way of expressing transference of ownership. This indicated believers were sharing their possessions in an organized way, and the apostles were responsible for distributing funds. Barnabas’s generous act was both an example of his helping nature and his encouraging others to do the same.

Acts 9:26-27

26 And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.

27 But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus 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. On the way to Damascus to find Christians to take as prisoners to Jerusalem, Saul 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 was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples. That is, he attempted to 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 believed not that he was a disciple**—they couldn’t imagine that Saul the zealous persecutor had become 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.

2 ▶ **Verse 27.** At this point, Barnabas, whom Luke introduced in Acts 4:36, 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* implies pulling someone aside. Barnabas may have 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 was the one who recounted Saul's life-changing experience: **how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that Jesus had spoken to him**, and how Saul **had preached boldly in the name of Jesus at Damascus**. The phrase *had preached 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 how monumentally significant it was that Barnabas advocated for Saul before the early church leaders to gain Saul's entrance into the Christian community. Both tremendous risk and immeasurable gain were at stake.

1. 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. 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.
2. Barnabas's risk resulted in unimaginable gain. He was instrumental in gaining entrance into the Christian movement for a man 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. ◀

GUIDE: Use **Bible**

Commentary **1** and

KEY WORD on page 121

(**PSG, p. 118**) to explain the background of Barnabus's nickname and tribe.

SUMMARIZE: We must

fully believe some things to be true if we are willing to generously give what we have to encourage others (**PSG, p. 119**):

- **God is the owner.** *When God entrusts us with what we have, He doesn't do so for us to hoard them; He enriches us 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, we're free to encourage others with what we have.*

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

STUDY THE BIBLE

Acts 9:26-27



10 minutes

READ: Ask a volunteer to read Acts 9:26-27.

GUIDE: Using **Bible Commentary 2** on page 123, explain the significant role Barnabas played in smoothing the way for Paul.

Acts 11:19-26

19 Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.

20 And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.

21 And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

22 Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.

23 Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

24 For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.

25 Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul:

26 And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

Encourage others by helping them grow spiritually.

Verse 19. In Acts 8:1-3, Luke reported that a great **persecution ... arose** against the church and caused the Christians to be **scattered**. Previously, we learned that Stephen had been one of the seven men believers had chosen to deal with practical matters among them (Acts 6:1-7).

Beyond his assigned duty of performing the, Stephen “did great wonders and miracles among the people” (v. 8) that drew the opposition of members of a local synagogue, who were unable to counter his wisdom and the Spirit who guided his speech. The synagogue members enlisted false witnesses to accuse Stephen of blasphemy. They charged him with saying Jesus would destroy the temple and change the customs Moses had given. Stephen was brought before the Sanhedrin, the Jews’ high court, where he defended himself with a lengthy sermon in which he asserted God never had confined Himself to one land or to the Jerusalem temple (6:9–7:50).

Stephen forthrightly charged his accusers: “ye do always resist the Holy Ghost” (v. 51). Furthermore, their ancestors had “persecuted” and “slain” the prophets “which shewed before of the coming of the Just One”—Jesus, the very One whom they had betrayed and murdered (vv. 51-52). Finally, Stephen accused the religious leaders with failing to keep the law God had given them (v. 53). Stephen’s sermon enraged the people who heard him. As he described seeing “Jesus standing on the right hand of God” (vv. 55-56), the leaders flew into a frenzy. They “cast him out of the city, and stoned him” (vv. 57-58). Saul held the killers’ robes and “consented unto his death” (v. 58; 8:1). A savage persecution of Christians ensued. As a result, Christians were scattered over Judea and Samaria.

3 ▶ The believers who **scattered** because of **the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch.** *Phenice* (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, located almost 300 miles north of Jerusalem. Hellenized Jews—Jews who spoke Greek and practiced Greek customs—lived in all these locations. Although some of the scattered believers may have been natives of Judea, most were probably Greek-speaking Jewish Christians; therefore, so they preached **the word to none but unto the Jews** in readily understood common Greek. The term *word* was used as 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 from God.

Verse 20. So far, believers had proclaimed the good news only to Jews. **Men of Cyprus and Cyrene**, however, now **spoke unto the Grecians.** Barnabas was a native of *Cyprus*. *Cyrene* was a city in North Africa. At some point, Christianity had spread to those areas. Greek-speaking Jewish Christians

SUMMARIZE: Opposition to the church arose under the leadership of a man named Saul, a Pharisee. The idea that this rebellious rabbi named Jesus should be worshiped was more than offensive to Saul—it was blasphemous **(PSG, p. 120).**

So, filled with venom and bitterness, Saul obsessively began to root out these pockets of Jesus followers, seizing them and, in some cases, putting them to death.

That all changed on the road to Damascus. Saul came face to face with the risen Jesus, and he was dramatically and irreversibly changed. The passionate persecutor became the mighty missionary.

Barnabas was willing to take a chance on this new convert. So convinced of the power of the gospel was Barnabas that he was willing to stand up for Paul.

DISCUSS: Question #3
(PSG, p. 121): What risks do we take when we stand up for others?

(Alternate: Who has been an encourager in your life?)

TRANSITION: “In the next verses we see how God used Barnabas to support not only an individual believer, but the spread of the gospel among all the Gentiles.”

STUDY THE BIBLE

Acts 11:19-26



15 minutes

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

GUIDE: Use **Bible Commentary 3** on page 125 and this page and **DIGGING DEEPER (PSG, p. 122)** to explain the term *Grecians* and the significance of spreading the gospel among the Gentiles.

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

had **come to Antioch** in Syria **preaching the Lord Jesus**. They added the term *Lord* to Jesus because Gentiles would understand it in the sense of “Ruler”; the word *Christ* would not have been as readily understood. *Spake* could have meant having conversations or *preaching*. Here, *Grecians* is another term for Gentiles. Thus, the Christians crossed national and racial barriers between Jews and Gentiles. ◀

Verse 21. The Christian witnesses experienced great success because **the hand of the Lord was with them**. In the Old Testament, *the hand of the Lord* referred to God’s activity—the exercise of His power. In Exodus 9:1-3, God told Moses if Pharaoh would not free the Israelites, His hand would strike Egypt’s livestock. In Acts 11:21, the phrase likely conveys the idea of God’s approval and power. As a result **a great number of Gentiles believed, and turned unto the Lord**. The term *believed* means “placed faith in” with the strong emphasis of commitment. Turning to Jesus included turning away from worshiping idols and making Him Sovereign in their lives.

Verse 22. Tidings of these things that were taking place in **Antioch of Syria came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem**. *These things* could refer to the great number of Gentile converts or to the missionaries’ activities. 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 **sent forth Barnabas** to make the 300-mile trip to Antioch to investigate. The *tidings* of Gentiles’ becoming believers in 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.

It was significant that Barnabas was chosen to represent the Jerusalem church. The church’s leaders obviously trusted his judgment. He had shown the ability to size up situations, 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. When Barnabas came to Antioch, he observed the rapid influx of Gentile believers into the church. He realized it was by **the grace of God**—God’s goodness in action on behalf of Gentiles—that all people were being included in His

offer of salvation through faith in Jesus. Barnabas rejoiced because of what was transpiring. True to his character, he **exhorted ... all the Gentile converts to cleave unto the Lord**—to remain faithful to Jesus **with purpose of heart**. The phrase *with purpose of heart* implies determined intent.

Verse 24. Luke gave a glowing description of Barnabas and the reason for his conduct: **He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith**. The term *good* indicates profitable, generous, upright, and virtuous. Barnabas likely had a number of spiritual gifts; evidenced by the phrase *full of the Holy Ghost*. Stephen was likewise gifted (6:5). Barnabas also was a man *of faith*, characterized by a strong trust in his Lord. Luke reported that **much people was added unto the Lord** as they made genuine faith commitments to Jesus.

Verse 25. With dramatic brevity Luke recorded one of the most significant events in Christianity (six words in the Greek text). The rapidly growing influx of new believers in Antioch required someone to help, so Barnabas went **to Tarsus for to seek 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, northwest of Antioch and not far away. Barnabas could have traveled by land or by sea. The Greek word for *seek* means “to hunt up” and includes the element of difficulty.

Verse 26. Barnabas **found Saul and brought him unto Antioch**. The two men worked for **a whole year, ... and taught much people in the church**. Teaching the basic truths and principles of following Jesus was necessary because of the Gentile converts’ pagan backgrounds.

To this point in the Christian movement, believers often used terms such as “brethren,” “disciples,” or “saints” to refer to one another. **In Antioch**, however, they were given a new name: **Christians**. The term *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*. One suggestion is that *Christians* was a nickname that expressed mockery and contempt. However, believers’ lives may have reflected their Lord’s character and teachings to the extent they became known as being like Him.

SUMMARIZE: How can we encourage spiritual growth in someone else? Barnabas’s example gives us some keys (PSG, pp. 123-124):

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

DISCUSS: Question #5 (PSG, p. 124): **How can you use your resources, gifts, skills, or talents to encourage others?**

(Alternate: How does encouragement play a role in our group?)

OPTION: If you used the “Words of Encouragement” optional activity at the beginning of the session, ask a volunteer to read the comments aloud now.

DO: Invite volunteers to share their responses to the activity on **PSG page 124: “Be an Encourager.”**

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 it is always easy to be critical of others, but God has called us to be encouragers.

PRAY: "Father, give us the same spirit that You have as we encourage others."

NOTE: Remind group members that **PSG pages 6-9** are there to journal one another's prayer requests.

LIVE IT OUT

What will you do to offer support and encouragement to others in the days to come? Consider the following applications:

- ▶ **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.

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. Now go and do likewise in the lives of others!

BIBLICAL
ILLUSTRATOR



ISTOCK PHOTO

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 B.C., 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.



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