

SESSION 4

BARNABAS: ONGOING ENCOURAGEMENT



What are some interesting nicknames you've encountered over the years?

QUESTION #1

#BSFLsecondnature

Christ-centered living chooses encouragement, not criticism.

THE PASSAGES

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

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

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 propped us up at different points in our lives. They have supported us in our faith even when it felt like the whole world was being turned upside down. And though these people might never be famous, never be recognized, and never receive applause, they play an essential role of support in our own lives.

It takes incredible strength of character to be this kind of support for another. 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. One man in Scripture is known better by his nickname—a nickname that reflected his consistent encouragement rather criticism, and we see in his life an example worth following.

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.

The Book of Acts provides a beautiful glimpse into the early days of the church. The disciples, who had scattered in fear when Jesus was crucified, rejoiced in His resurrection and were filled with the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. They boldly shared the good news of forgiveness in Christ, and thousands more believed.

Thus, the church was born—this new community of people who, apart from their shared faith, had no reason to associate together. Old divisions of creed, economic status, and educational level disappeared, and the new church found great joy in growing closer to God and to each other. They freely shared what they had and encouraged one another daily (Acts 4:32-34).

Among those new believers was a man named Joseph. This man apparently was so gifted and willing with his encouragement of others that he soon earned a nickname—"Barnabas"—that literally means "the son of consolation" or encouragement. It seems that Barnabas was a man of means who lived up to his nickname, and 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.

Like Barnabas, we also have been given resources—talents, time, or finances—and we can choose to use them to encourage

others, or we can hang onto them for our own security, comfort, and convenience. 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 generously give what we have to encourage others:

- ▶ **God is the owner.** Since God is the owner, then we are the stewards, and the primary job of stewards is to use what's been entrusted to us according to the wishes of 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.** If we believe God is generous and wise in the way he distributes His blessings, then we must conclude that we have enough to give to someone else. One reason why we fail to encourage others is because we look at what we have and think that it is insignificant. 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.** One of the most basic reasons why we fail to use what we have to encourage others is because we worry that if we give something—whether it's time, emotional investment, or some other resource—we won't have enough left for ourselves. So we hang onto what we've been given. If we are going to encourage others with what we have, we must also be convinced that God has provided, and will continue to provide, what we need. When we trust in God's provision, we're free to encourage others with what we have.

What makes generosity a source of encouragement?

QUESTION #2

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.

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. 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 (9:1-2).

That all changed on the road to Damascus. On this mission of persecution, Saul was knocked off his high horse. Saul came face to face with the risen Jesus, and he was dramatically and irreversibly changed. The passionate persecutor became the mighty missionary. The hater of Christianity became its most ardent advocate.

The early believers knew about Saul. They lived in fear of the day when he might come for them. Then suddenly, a rumor circulated that Saul had completely changed course; he was now with them instead of against them. We can understand their hesitancy. Surely more than a few thought this supposed conversion was just another trick in order to infiltrate their ranks.

Consider how history might have been different if not for the encouraging spirit of Barnabas. Barnabas was willing to take a chance on this new convert. Barnabas was confident in the power of the gospel, having experienced the saving power of Jesus himself, so he believed this conversion could be real. So convinced of the power of the gospel was Barnabas that he was willing to stand up for Paul.

Few things are more powerful than one who will stand up for another—especially when that other person has done nothing to deserve it. Perhaps you know what it feels like to be mistreated or excluded from some group. How encouraging, when you are at your loneliest or most vulnerable position, to have someone speak on your behalf and be your advocate. Those kinds of moments can change a person's life. Be mindful of others who need an advocate.

Every time we encourage and advocate for others, we serve as reminders that a far greater Advocate for us is in heaven. Even now, Jesus Christ is interceding for all believers at the right hand of God (1 John 2:1). When we stand up to advocate for others, we become like a shadow of Jesus, the only one who can truly be our Advocate.

What risks do we take when we stand up for others?

QUESTION #3

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.

It was always God's intent that the gospel spread beyond Jerusalem and the Jewish population there; it has always been in His heart that the church be made up of people from every tribe, tongue, nation and people (Matt. 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. So they sent their trusted emissary, Barnabas, to check out the situation. Apparently Barnabas had such a reputation as a man of God, the church could think of no one better to represent them.

DIGGING DEEPER



"GRECIANS"

These coastal towns were all heavily Hellenized, and the Greek language would have been dominant. It was thus an appropriate area for witness by these Greek-speaking Hellenist Christians. Quite naturally, they witnessed at first to Jews only, probably to fellow Greek-speaking Jews, as Stephen had done in the Diaspora synagogues of Jerusalem (6:9). But at Antioch they

took a bolder step and began preaching to Gentiles as well. This step was taken by those who were themselves Diaspora Jews. It was only natural that a concern for evangelization of the Gentiles should be especially felt by the Jewish Christians of the dispersion who had grown up in a Gentile environment and had a more worldwide perspective than the more provincial Palestinian Christians

John B. Polhill, Acts, vol. 26 of *The New American Commentary*, gen. ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 270-271.

Having seen the grace of God at work in these new Gentile believers, Barnabas turned to what was second nature to him: encouragement. Specifically, he encouraged these new believers to grow spiritually. Growth in Christ is not just an individual responsibility; we are meant to play a part in nurturing and encouraging one another in our faith.

“But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:13).

“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (10:24-25).

Who has encouraged your spiritual growth over the years?

QUESTION #4

How do we encourage spiritual growth in someone else?
Barnabas’s example gives us some keys:

- ▶ **Encourage with joy.** When Barnabas arrived in Antioch and saw what God was doing, he “was glad.” Our greatest joy should come from seeing the work of God in other lives. To see someone be born again and then to play a role in encouraging them to grow up in Christ are wonderful opportunities of eternal consequence. Of course, experiencing that kind of joy only comes with personal investment. We must be willing to get our hands dirty, so to speak, and live alongside others in a close enough way that we can speak truth into their lives.
- ▶ **Encourage with faith.** Barnabas encouraged these new believers in faith “that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.” Barnabas was known as “a good man, and full

of the Holy Ghost and of faith.” Through the Spirit, he sought to deepen their young faith, to discover what the Holy Spirit could do in and through them as they lived out their faith.

- ▶ **Encourage with perseverance.** Barnabas brought in Saul, and together, they persevered in discipling the believers in their walk with Christ. We shouldn’t think encouragement is a one-time thing. Spiritual growth is a life-long process that calls for us to persevere. Encouragement must be repeated over and over again. After all, this is how God deals with us: He continually speaks this message to us through His Spirit.

How can you use your resources, gifts, skills, or talents to encourage others?

QUESTION #5

BE AN ENCOURAGER

From the words below, choose one that represents your relationship to someone who might need encouragement. Write out two or three ways you could encourage this person this week:

neighbor

friend

parent

sibling

employer

teacher

coworker

child

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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!



Share with others how you will live out this study: [#BSFLsecondnature](#)