

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.

► **What nicknames have you been given over the years?**

INTRO

Any meaningful achievement is the result of a large combination of factors. The home-run in the playoffs required talent, as well as years of batting practice and sweating in the gym. But that's not all. It also required your parents driving you to practice when you were nine years old, and, perhaps most importantly, encouraging you to keep going when you struck out or when you sat the bench as a freshman. There were likely times you forgot to say "thank you," or maybe you even failed to recognize their role in your success. Nonetheless, we'd never accomplish very much without the support and encouragement of others. The Christian life is similar—the encouragement of others is essential to walking through tough times and fulfilling our potential in Christ. Barnabas, a name that points to his gift of encouragement, provides a great example of how to encourage others.

ACTS 4:36-37

Barnabas is the nickname given to a man named Joseph because he was known for, more than anything else, encouraging people. In the early days of the church, no one knew each other, and they had very little in common apart from Jesus. When, otherwise it would have been easy to focus on and criticize the differences, the Spirit empowered Barnabas to be a great encourager. One of the ways he impacted others was through sharing—not only encouraging words, but Barnabas even sold his property to meet the practical needs of people in the church. His example of sacrifice and trusting God was powerful in pointing others to Jesus. One way we can make a big difference for the sake of the kingdom is by being intentionally encouraging.

► **How did Barnabas' actions in this passage encourage others?**

ACTS 9:26-27

A man named Saul, a Pharisee of Pharisees, hated this new religious movement. After all, to worship this rebel rabbi named Jesus was, in Saul's mind, utter blasphemy, and he was determined to see it snuffed out by any means necessary. Then something miraculous happened! Saul was headed to Damascus on a mission to persecute Christians when he ran squarely into Jesus, and he was dramatically changed. The great persecutor became the great missionary; Saul became Paul. However, the early believers just couldn't believe it. They knew of Saul's persecutions, and because they were afraid, they refused to accept him as a brother. Had it not been for Barnabas, history would have been written very differently. He believed in the power of the gospel and was willing to take a chance on Paul. There are few things more powerful than someone being willing to stand up for someone else. More importantly, you serve as a picture of Jesus, our great Advocate who stands before the Father on our behalf.

► **Who has encouraged your spiritual growth over the years?**

ACTS 11:19-26

God called Barnabas to be an encourager, and Barnabas found many ways to use his gifts. Initially, the Christian faith flourished among Jews in Jerusalem, but it was always God's purpose that the gospel would be carried all over the world. Barnabas encouraged the spread of the gospel in unlikely places and among unlikely people. When he saw the grace of God at work among Gentiles, in true Barnabas fashion, he began encouraging the new believers in their relationships with God. In the same way, we're called to encourage even the unlikeliest of followers. After all, if God would use Barnabas to encourage a murderer like Paul and a bunch of former pagans, He will use you to make a difference in others' lives.

► **Why is encouragement a necessary element in the church?**



LIVE IT OUT

▶ CHRIST

God has promised comfort, peace, and joy for those who trust in Him. However, many times we fail to experience these, and even become discouraged. When we find ourselves in this situation, it's likely because we're not living day by day in close relationship with Jesus, being continually encouraged by Him.

▶ **In what areas do you need the encouragement that comes only from a relationship with Jesus?**

▶ **What steps will you take to pursue Him?**

▶ COMMUNITY

Scripture has a lot to say about the importance of having encouragers in our lives. What can you take away from these verses? How will you use your resources, gifts, skills, or talents to encourage others?

▶ **Ecclesiastes 4:9-10**

▶ **Ephesians 4:29**

▶ **Hebrews 3:13**

▶ **Hebrews 10:24-25**

▶ CULTURE

The world is defined not by the natural inclination to build up and encourage, but by stepping on others, even tearing them down for the sake of getting ahead.

▶ **In what ways do you see this reality?**

▶ **How will you confront the culture to be known as an encourager?**



BIBLE READING PLAN



DAY 1
ACTS 4:1-22

DAY 2
ACTS 4:23-37

DAY 3
ACTS 5:1-16

DAY 4
ACTS 5:17-42

DAY 5
ACTS 6:1-15

DAY 6
ACTS 7:1-34

DAY 7
ACTS 7:35-60