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## Encourage



**QUESTION 1:**

*When have you crossed paths with a natural encourager?*

## THE POINT

Encouragement  
strengthens relationships.



## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

We've been encouraged all our lives to take our vitamins. So we do. Since the 1940s, we've been popping them in our mouths daily. 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 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 to grow as God intends.

Just ask any athlete about the benefit they gain when they have the "home field advantage." Encouragement helps. Unfortunately, too many of us face a deficiency in this area. Our lives and our relationships can grow weak without encouragement.

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

**<sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> 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. We'll let him serve as our encouragement coach, because by his example, he showed us three ways we can encourage others.

First, we can 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 up others 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.

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. 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.

### QUESTION 2:

***What risks do you take when you endorse an outsider?***

Barnabas, however, realized Saul was a changed man. He saw Saul as a man truly transformed 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 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. 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 man, the gospel of Christ made it to 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. Without Barnabas, it's likely that Saul would've been 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" who could use an invitation into your circle of influence? You may never know the difference you make in another's life when you extend the hand of fellowship and invite him or her into your world.

## ACTS 11:21-24

**<sup>21</sup> The Lord's hand was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. <sup>22</sup> News about them reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to travel as far as Antioch. <sup>23</sup> 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, <sup>24</sup> for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And large numbers of people were added to the Lord.**

We can also 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" (v. 23). Barnabas surely strengthened these new saints enormously as he 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 did more than pay lip service to the joy of his faith; he embodied it. His message and conduct were in sync: "for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith" (v. 24).

Perhaps you are in a season when you are starving for a good word from a friend like Barnabas. Do you have someone who breathes fresh wind into your sails, 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? Are you seeing someone wither? Be a Barnabas and begin the process of investing in another person. Both of you will be blessed.

### QUESTION 3:

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



## ACTS 11:25-26

<sup>25</sup> Then he went to Tarsus to search for Saul, <sup>26</sup> 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.

And we can encourage service.

- ▶ “Wow, you’re really gifted with kids!”
- ▶ “You made my week with that beautiful song!”
- ▶ “Have you ever thought about leading a small group of your own? When you speak, people listen.”

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 are some things that might get in the way of people using their spiritual gifts in the church?***

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, so that the two became a formidable force for discipleship. Revival was evident as Saul and Barnabas leveraged life-giving words. Saul served because he was obedient to the call of God and Barnabas encouraged him in his work.

But Barnabas didn’t just use words to encourage Saul’s ministry and teaching. He also encouraged through his actions: he served alongside Saul.

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.

### QUESTION 5:

***What are some ways we can encourage others to serve in our church?***

## ENCOURAGE OTHERS

*List a specific way you could encourage the following people this week. Circle one that you will prioritize in the next few days.*

**Neighbor:**

**Coworker:**

**Friend:**

**Family member:**

**Fellow church member:**

**Clerk at the store:**

**Another person in your sphere of influence:**

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*“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you are already doing.”*

1 THESSALONIANS 5:11

