



WnL CONNECT GROUPS

The Church Encouraged

Acts 11:22-24

MAIN POINT

New believers need the encouragement of mature believers in their faithfulness to Christ.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

- Describe a time when you were the beneficiary of timely encouragement. In what form did the encouragement come? What difference did it make?
- How do you most naturally encourage others? How often do you notice that happening?
- Who are the people whom God has used the most to propel your growth in Christ? What roles did they play?

In this week's session, Luke described the role Barnabas played at a critical crossroads in the growth and expansion of the New Testament church. In trying to nurture the unanticipated expansion of the gospel to the Gentiles, the leaders in Jerusalem tried desperately to ascertain the validity of the salvation experiences. In sending Barnabas, a man known for his gift of encouragement, the power of his mentoring with the new converts proved to be a catalyst for continued gospel effectiveness.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Have a volunteer read Acts 11:22.

The report of the happenings in Antioch reached the ears of the leadership in Jerusalem, whose ears would have been attentive to any word of Gentile acceptance of the gospel. The advance of the gospel to Gentiles was in full effect.



However, nothing to date could match the grand scale of what was happening in Antioch. Luke's vocabulary in Acts 11 made clear that a large number of people in cosmopolitan Antioch were turning to the Lord. The task of following up on those salvation experiences became much more challenging with such a large number. The answer from the church leaders was to send Barnabas. He was well-known and equally well-respected. Barnabas's encouraging nature made him a perfect candidate to support the new converts in Antioch.

- Think back to the moment when you accepted Christ as your Savior. In the days and weeks following, who followed up with you? How did it help you as a new believer to know how to grow?
- How do you think the need for follow-up after salvation differed for Gentiles, who had no background in understanding the promise of the Messiah? What would be a comparable situation in our modern culture?

Have a volunteer read Acts 11:23.

Barnabas was overjoyed to see the evidence of God's grace at work among the community of believers. Barnabas's joy spilled over to the converts with whom he had contact. As he had been encouraged by their response to the gospel, he returned the encouragement with an admonition to remain faithful in following their new Savior. The focus of Barnabas's encouragement was perseverance, the equipping of the new converts to continue to live for Christ beyond the euphoric experience of the initial days of knowing Him as Savior.

- When you consider the description of Barnabas as a son of encouragement, who in your life best fits that description? What about that person has been the most remarkable for you? What impact does being in his or her company have on your walk with Christ?
- Why do you think it was such a priority for the leaders in Jerusalem to send Barnabas to investigate the validity of the salvation accounts in Antioch when they heard about them? Do you think such investigation is still important today? If so, what form do you think it should take?

Have a volunteer read Acts 11:24.

In a touching description of the man whom Luke evidently held in high regard, Luke illustrated why Barnabas was the right man to encourage the new believers. Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. What an incredible way to be described by someone of spiritual insight. According to Luke's vocabulary, Barnabas reflected the essence of the gospel. Barnabas's presence was a powerful witness to what a journey with Christ looked like. Being in Barnabas's Spirit-filled presence, then, was a tangible goal to which the new converts could aspire.



- Considering the impact Barnabas had already had in the new church, why is our ongoing spiritual growth and discipleship crucial for the advancement of the kingdom of God?
- How do you think those who know you well would describe you? How would you like for them to describe you? What areas of growth in your walk with Christ would continue to sanctify you into the person God has called you to be?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

- How would you rate your ability to rejoice when you hear of the spiritual victory of others? What does that tell you about what God is doing in your life?
- How confident would you be repeating Paul's words, "Be imitators of me" (1 Cor. 11:1) to younger believers? How do you feel about your answer?
- Who in your circles of biblical community refreshes and encourages you in your spiritual service? How often do you spend time with them in conversation?

PRAYER

Pray that God would use your group as a source of encouragement for those who are faithfully serving, but who may be tired. Pray that God would lead you to those whom He wants you to encourage. Finally, ask that God would lead you to those who can encourage you to deeper levels of spiritual fortitude and gospel effectiveness.

