

Session 11

PARTNERSHIP

Acts 9:26-27; 11:19-26

Memory Verse

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.

– ACTS 9:27, CSB




Partnership

THEOLOGICAL THEME: All people need others who will encourage them in the faith and spur them on to fulfill the life God has for them. Believers should look for these people in their lives and for those they can also encourage in this way.

Have you ever known people who were huge fans of a specific sports team and made sure everyone knew about their fandom? They might dress in team colors consistently, go to as many games as possible, and generally show passion for their team.

Now, consider if you saw one of those people quickly change allegiance to another team in the same sport and even in the same conference. Suddenly that person now cheers for the same team as you. That would be kind of shocking. You may even struggle to believe he or she is now truly a fan of your favorite team because of how passionately he or she cheered against your players previously. Change can be hard to accept when past behavior indicates a different reality. Although team allegiances are not so serious, this is a picture of what can happen when people turn to God and leave behind a past totally against things of the Lord.

 How common would you say it is to see a person change their fandom from one team to another?

 Why would it be tough to accept that change as being real?

Session Summary


After the Damascus Road experience and Saul's conversion to faith in Christ, there were still some things to overcome from his past. Even though some time had passed, people remembered how he had led in persecuting the Jewish believers and were wary of accepting his newfound faith. But Barnabas took a stand and included Saul in ministry activities. Because Barnabas vouched for Saul and showed others that they could trust his claims, Saul was able to fulfill God's calling on his life in a powerful way.

We all need people in our lives who encourage us and draw us further into the life of faith. We all need allies, and we also need to be allies for others. Think about the significance of Barnabas including Saul in the ministry of the early church and what a huge impact it had on the world. Saul became one of the greatest apostles of all time after his transformation. All believers should be open to who they need to be "Barnabases" for and thankful for the "Barnabases" who have poured into them.

1. An Unlikely Ally (Acts 9:26-27)

It is always incredible to see a person who was once opposed to the gospel see the truth and come to faith in Christ. It can be dramatic and powerful to observe the changes that take place when a person surrenders his or her life to Jesus. In these verses, Saul was struggling to fit in after choosing to believe. The disciples were hesitant to accept the change Saul experienced and were not immediately welcoming to him.

The disciples were not sure they could believe Saul was now a disciple like them. His past reputation was strong and affected how the disciples in Jerusalem treated him. Maybe they had not received word from Damascus of what occurred there. It's also possible that they were suspicious he was pretending to be converted to infiltrate and do more harm to the church. Whatever was behind their attitudes toward Saul, they did not accept or welcome him into the fold. It appears they wanted to see if his claimed life change was real or not.

 Have you seen or experienced something like the situation with Saul and the disciples? As is appropriate, share about this experience with this group.

Jesus said believers should be known for their love (see John 13:35). We are not called to judge others but to love and encourage them in the faith. Imagine if Saul had given up and walked away. What if he decided it was too hard to continue serving God boldly and went off to live alone and do something else. Any time Christ followers fail to lovingly accept others into the faith, it is possible that they may be driven away from the Lord altogether. It is dangerous to the body of Christ for the church to refuse to accept the change that happens in people's lives. Saul also needed to extend grace to the disciples as he continued to live his new life of faith that was so contrary to his previous interactions with believers. Consistent behavior over time can do wonders to prove the validity of a transformative faith.



What is at risk if we fail to receive others who claim to have received God's grace but have questionable pasts? How have we all been in this position to some degree?

It took one person to take a stand and do the right thing. Barnabas believed and accepted the Saul's conversion as real, and he did something about it. Barnabas lived up to his name—which means “son of encouragement” (Acts 4:36)—in the way he treated Saul. Barnabas didn't just say something encouraging to Saul; he took Saul with him to meet with the disciples. It wasn't just about saying he believed in Saul's conversion; he put his faith and encouragement into action.

When Barnabas brought Saul before the disciples, he showed the love of Christ and made a bold statement with his actions. Barnabas spoke on Saul's behalf and described to the others what happened to bring about the conversion Saul claimed to have experienced. It is fair to assume Barnabas had spent time with Saul and listened to his story directly. This would have been key to how Barnabas treated Saul differently than the other disciples. Before making assumptions about other people's stories, we should take time to listen to their stories for ourselves. When we invest time getting to know people and hearing their hearts, we will be more equipped to recognize how God has worked in their lives.

? Application: When have you had the opportunity to welcome someone new into the faith? How did hearing his or her story for yourself matter?

2. New Opportunities (Acts 11:19-23)

The church was initially focused on preaching to the Jews, then they began to share the good news with the Gentiles as well. Antioch is the place where we first see the gospel being shared with Gentiles. This effort produced powerful results, as a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

These new opportunities for ministry were opened because of the prior persecution of the church. Without dramatic opposition, many believers would have stayed in Jerusalem and missed what God was doing in this city some three hundred miles north of Jerusalem. What the enemy means for evil, God can and does turn into divine opportunities to spread His Word and multiply the church.

? How did the persecution of the believers in Jerusalem serve as a catalyst for the spread of the gospel? When was a time you faced difficult circumstances that God used for His glory?

Considered a pagan city, Antioch was known for business, commerce, sophistication, and immorality. It was in this setting that we see the hand of the Lord on the bold believers. We can be encouraged today that God's hand follows His people even when they live in places that are collectively far from Him like Antioch was.

? How does knowing God's hand is on His people even in ungodly places encourage you? How might God use His people even more powerfully in these environments?

When the church in Jerusalem heard about all God was doing in Antioch, they saw the need to help and sent Barnabas. This is the man who accepted Saul and was known for his mature faith and generous spirit. Barnabas went to Antioch and encouraged the believers there even as he helped build up their faith. Though many converts were being added to the church, these would have been people with very different religious upbringings who needed to be disciplined in the ways of Jesus. What an incredible opportunity to invest in Kingdom work. Barnabas is a great example of responding to the need for discipleship and pouring into a growing body of believers.

Barnabas saw what was happening at the church in Antioch and he was glad. When God is at work, you can see His hand of grace upon people, and it is exciting. Barnabas encouraged his fellow believers to stay the course, remain faithful, and keep going. There is a tendency in ministry to get exhausted and worn down. Imagine leading a large group of people who were all very fresh in their faith and needed to learn everything about following Christ. Barnabas recognized this could be daunting and shared uplifting words to encourage them continue and keep reaching people.

? Application: When have you needed encouragement to keep going in your faith or been the one to give encouragement? Why is this continually important in the church?

3. Partners with Purpose (Acts 11:24-26)

Barnabas was described as a good man, full of faith and the Holy Spirit. What a testimony of how he lived. Saul was not the only person Barnabas poured into. Because it was his nature and character, there are undoubtedly many others that we do not read about. Saul may be the most dramatic example and the one God used to make the greatest impact on the world for thousands of years to come.

? What qualities would you like people to notice about you? What are you doing to cultivate those in your life?

Barnabas got to see large numbers of people continue coming to faith and being converted through the church in Antioch. Although some time had passed, Barnabas had not forgotten Saul and used this as another opportunity to bring Saul into the fold of Christian leaders. He found Saul in Tarsus—where he had been sent for his own protection—and invited him into more ministry opportunities. As he evaluated the needs in Antioch, Barnabas likely realized how much work there was to do and knew he needed help to lead effectively.

When we read that Barnabas went to find Saul, it is with the implication that he had to search diligently to find him. This took time away from the work that was waiting in Antioch, but Barnabas obviously felt like finding Saul was worth it. He must have believed Saul could make a huge impact on those in Antioch. Although it cost Barnabas time, he was also establishing a better system of leadership in this growing church.

? Why is having the right leadership in place important in a growing community of believers? Why does this require multiple people leading and the church operating collectively as the body of Christ?

Saul had spent about ten years in Tarsus when Barnabas came to seek him out. Although there is not much record of what happened during those years, the future fruit makes it safe to assume he spent those years preparing for what God was going to do. Just like us, Saul did not have a specific outline of what his future would be, but he continued to prepare and grow in his faith so that he would be ready for whatever came his way.

Together Saul and Barnabas spent a year with the church in Antioch. They spent their time teaching, encouraging, and building up the body of Christ so that the church could stand strong in the depraved world around them. This duo had a huge impact, and it was in relation to this body of believers that the term “Christian” was first used. Though the word was originally meant to be derogatory or mocking, the believers embraced the title and it stuck. An interesting point from the wording of this passage is that believers were “first” called Christians at Antioch. This was the original place that term was used, but it is also helpful to think about the title of Christian being the first thing someone notices about a follower of Christ. Do we live our lives in a way that others notice we are Christians before anything else?

? Application: What would have to happen for people to use the word “Christian” to describe you first before any other title?

Conclusion

Barnabas demonstrated that powerful things could happen when believers are focused on encouraging one another. People need to be lifted up, taught, and even gently pushed into their callings at times. Most of us can think of someone who took a stand for us along the way and encouraged us to fulfill God’s purpose for our life. Barnabas spoke up against those who doubted Saul’s conversion and gave him a chance to show how real it was.

Saul continued to grow and develop in his faith to the point that he became one of the most influential and God honoring apostles of all time. We all need people like Barnabas that we can look to for encouragement and spiritual teaching. We also need to lead and encourage in other people’s lives. It is not our job to judge or exclude but to embrace those who come to faith even if their backgrounds seem dramatically far from Jesus. Sometimes it only takes one person to make a huge difference in another person’s faith journey and to have a huge impact on the world as we see in Saul’s life. Our job is to be open and obedient to whatever opportunities the Lord brings our way.

? Who do you need to be a “Barnabas” to this week? How will you encourage or lovingly challenge another person in his or her faith this week?

? How would our church look different if we lived this way together consistently?



How do you need to prepare now for future ministry opportunities that might come your way?

Here's How to Become a Christ-Follower:

Read the following verses and ask after each one: "What does this say to me?"

- **All have sinned:** Romans 3:23 & 1 John 1:8
- **The wages of sin:** Romans 6:23 & John 3:18
- **But while we were sinners, salvation was provided:** Romans 5:8
- **Become a Christ-follower:** Romans 10:9-10 Confess and Believe

Accepting Christ is Just the Beginning:

Next Steps:

- Publicly profess your faith by being baptized (Matthew 10:32-33; Luke 3:21; Romans 6:4).
- Join a church which follows the Bible, where you can grow in your faith through prayer, Bible study and fellowship with other Christians.
- Get involved in groups for encouragement and accountability.
- Begin a daily personal worship experience with God where you study the Bible and pray.
- Share with others what Jesus has done for you. Tell your story (Romans 10:14; Matthew 28:19-20).
- Begin to live for God (Romans 12:1-2, 9-18; James 1:19-27).



FOR NEXT WEEK

Multiplication Matters

Main Passages

- Acts 13:1-5

Session Outline

1. Called Out (Acts 13:1-2)
2. Answering the Call (Acts 13:3)
3. Living Sent (Acts 13:4-5)

Memorize

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.

- Acts 9:27, CSB