

Discussion Guide

Date: 11/15/2026

Sermon Title: Can my words really make a difference?

Scripture: Acts 4:32-37

This discussion guide is a layout to be used with a group or class. We have included opening and closing prayers to start and end your group. The guide may be used for personal or family reflection as well.

OPENING PRAYER:

Gracious and loving God, thank you for the people you have placed in our lives who have encouraged us, believed in us, and helped us become who you created us to be. Thank you for the gift of words and the opportunity we have to use them to bring life, hope, and healing to others. As we gather today, open our hearts to your Word. Help us recognize the influence our words have on those around us. Forgive us for the times we have discouraged others, remained silent when encouragement was needed, or failed to see the potential you have placed in someone else. May our words and actions point others toward Jesus, Amen.

BIG IDEA:

Leadership is not always about being the person with the answers, making all the decisions, or standing in front of the room. Sometimes leadership is the person who believes in someone when they struggle to believe in themselves. Barnabas reminds us that encouragement is more than saying something nice. It is a way of seeing people through the eyes of God's grace, recognizing their potential, coming alongside them, and helping them take their next faithful step. Our words have the power to build confidence, restore hope, strengthen relationships, and help others recognize what God is doing in their lives.

Central Question: What difference might it make in someone's life if I became more intentional about being an encourager?

QUESTIONS TO BEGIN:

Before looking at Scripture, consider these questions:

1. Who is someone in your life who has been an encourager? What did they do or say that made such a difference?
2. Can you remember a time when someone believed in you, gave you an opportunity, or spoke a word of encouragement when you needed it most?
3. Why do you think encouragement is sometimes overlooked as an important leadership skill?

Leader's note: Allow people to share personal stories. The goal is to recognize that encouragement is not insignificant. Often, the words we remember most are the words someone spoke when we needed them.

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT TO OUR STORY:

The passage takes place in the early days of the Christian church, following Pentecost. The apostles are proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus, and the community of believers is growing. The early church was more

than a gathering of people who shared similar beliefs. They were becoming a new kind of community shaped by the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Several important things are happening in this passage:

- Unity of heart and soul: Luke describes a community whose faith has shaped how they relate to one another. Their unity is not simply organizational; it is spiritual and relational.
- Generosity and shared responsibility: Believers are willing to share their possessions so that no one among them is in need. Their faith becomes visible through their care for one another.
- The power of testimony: The apostles continue to testify boldly to the resurrection of Jesus. Their message is supported by the way the community lives.
- Barnabas emerges as an example: Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, sells a field and brings the proceeds to the apostles. They give him the name Barnabas, which Luke translates as "son of encouragement."

Barnabas is introduced here not through a sermon or a position of authority, but through an act of generosity that strengthens the community. His life demonstrates that encouragement is not merely something we say. It is something we embody.

READIN& EXPLORING THE TEXT ACTS 4:32-37:

Invite someone in the group to read the passage aloud. If possible, have another person read it a second time, listening for words or phrases that stand out.

1. In verses 32–33, Luke describes the believers as being of "one heart and soul." What do you think that looked like in everyday life? What might make that kind of unity difficult in the church today?
2. The early Christians were willing to share what they had so that no one was in need. What does this tell us about the relationship between Christian faith and how we treat other people?
3. Verse 33 connects the apostles' testimony about the resurrection with the community's experience of grace. Why do you think Luke places these two things together?
4. What stands out to you about Barnabas's actions in verses 36–37? Why do you think Luke chose to introduce him this way?
5. Barnabas was given a name that described his character and influence. If someone gave you a name based on the way you influence others, what might that name be?

A thought to consider: The early church was strengthened not only by the preaching of the apostles but also by the generosity, compassion, and encouragement of its members. Every believer had a role in creating a community where people could grow in faith.

FURTHER STUDY:

Read Acts 13:13 and Acts 15:36–41; this may be the most compelling example of Barnabas as an encourager.

During their first missionary journey, John Mark leaves Paul and Barnabas and returns to Jerusalem. Scripture does not tell us exactly why he left, but Paul later views his departure as a reason not to take him on another journey. When Paul and Barnabas prepare for another missionary journey, Barnabas wants to give John Mark another opportunity. Paul strongly disagrees. The disagreement becomes so sharp that the two missionary partners separate.

Barnabas takes John Mark with him. We don't know everything that happened between Barnabas and John Mark, but we can see the importance Barnabas placed on offering someone another opportunity. There is an interesting conclusion to this story. Years later, Paul speaks positively about John Mark:

- Colossians 4:10 – Mark is mentioned as a fellow worker.
- Philemon 1:24 – Mark is included among Paul's fellow workers.
- 2 Timothy 4:11 – Paul specifically asks Timothy to bring Mark because he is useful to him in ministry.

Traditionally, John Mark is associated with the Gospel of Mark, although the New Testament does not explicitly identify him as its author. Barnabas's encouragement did not necessarily mean that John Mark's failure was unimportant. It meant that his failure did not have to define his future.

1. Why do you think Barnabas was willing to risk his relationship with Paul to give John Mark another opportunity?
2. What is the difference between encouraging someone and simply excusing their mistakes?
3. How can we balance accountability with grace when someone has disappointed us?
4. Who in your life might need someone to believe in them again?
5. How might Barnabas's decision have changed the trajectory of John Mark's life and ministry?

Leadership insight: Encouragement doesn't mean telling people that everything they do is right. It means helping them see that God's grace is bigger than their failures and that there is still a place for them to grow, serve, and make a difference.

SERMON QUESTIONS:

1. Pastor Clayton opens the sermon with the well known phrase, “Sticks and stone may break my bones, but word will never hurt me”. What words from your past have had the most lasting impact on you, and how have they shaped the person you are today?
2. Pastor Clayton explains the word “*encoragier” which is french. When broken down as “En” to put into and “Corage” is heart, spirit, courage. So,* this word translates as *to put heart in someo*ne. How does this expound your understanding of being an encourager?
3. Of the three qualities of Barnabas that were mentioned in the sermon of generosity, seeing the good in others, and offering second chances; which one comes most naturally to you? Which one do you most need to grow in?
4. The sermon draws a connection between the word 'exhort' and the Greek word for the Holy Spirit, paraclete, suggesting that encouragement is a deeply spiritual act — how does understanding encouragement as a Spirit-led practice change the way you think about your everyday interactions?
5. The sermon pointed out that our world is full of negativity, especially on social media. How do you personally navigate that environment? Are there ways you may be contributing to discouragement without realizing it?

REFLECTION AND APPLICATION:

1. What practices or spiritual disciplines might help us develop that same kind of vision in our own relationships of being an encourager like Barnabas?
2. What is one specific, concrete step you can take this week to put courage or heart into someone else?

A WESLEYAN PERSPECTIVE: ENCOURAGEMENT AS A MEANS OF GRACE

One of the beautiful connections between Barnabas and Wesleyan theology is the understanding that Christian growth happens in community. John Wesley did not believe that following Jesus was intended to be an isolated experience. He believed we needed one another to grow in holiness and love.

John Wesley had this idea of Christian Conferencing. Wesley identified Christian conference as a means of grace. This involved Christians gathering to pray, share their faith journeys, encourage one another, speak truth in love, and help one another grow. In his understanding, our conversations with one another could become a channel through which God's grace works in our lives. Wesley even challenged Methodists to consider whether their conversations were filled with grace and whether their words were building others up.

Consider these Scriptures:

- Hebrews 10:24–25 – Encourage one another and spur one another toward love and good deeds.
- Ephesians 4:29 – Let our words build others up and give grace to those who hear.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11 – Encourage one another and build each other up.

Encouragement is not simply a personality trait. It can become a spiritual practice through which we participate in God's work of forming disciples.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Gracious God, thank you for the example of Barnabas, a person whose life reminds us that encouragement is a powerful expression of your love. We are thankful to the people who have encouraged us along the way. For those who believed in us when we doubted ourselves, who stood beside us when we struggled, and who helped us see possibilities we could not yet see. Lord, help us become those kinds of people for others. Give us eyes to see the gifts and potential in those around us. Give us wisdom to know when to speak and when simply to listen. Help us use our words to bring hope instead of discouragement, healing instead of hurt, and confidence instead of fear. Make us people who build others up, who bear one another's burdens, and who help others grow into the people you created them to be. In the name of Jesus Christ, who calls us, loves us, and never gives up on us. Amen.

WAYS TO RESPOND:

Encouragement becomes meaningful when it moves beyond a good intention and becomes an action. This week, consider taking the Barnabas Challenge:

1. **Write it down.** Think of two or three people in your life who could use encouragement right now. Write a note, send a message, or make a call this week. Be specific about what you appreciate or believe about them.
2. **Practice generosity.** Identify one way you can be generous with your time, talent, or treasure in the coming week; not just financially, but in ways that put your heart into someone else.
3. **Extend a second chance.** Is there someone you have distanced yourself from because of a past disappointment or failure? Pray about whether God is calling you to re-engage with that person and offer grace.
4. **Be an advocate.** Look for an opportunity to speak well of someone who might not have a voice in a particular room or situation; someone who needs a Barnabas to step in on their behalf.
5. **Audit your words.** For one week, pay attention to the ratio of encouraging words to discouraging or critical words you speak. Ask a trusted friend or family member for honest feedback on whether you tend to build people up or tear them down.