

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

SAY: “In our last session, we learned that we are to share Christ with others. Today we will look at how Christians encourage one another.” Invite members to turn to **page 3** in the **Personal Study Guide (PSG)** and review session titles.

DISCUSS: Draw attention to the picture (**PSG, p. 70**) as you introduce **Question #1: When have you seen something go viral?**

OPTION: IN ADVANCE, prepare to show a few video clips of people taking the “ice-bucket challenge” for the sake of those who may not have seen any. A link to these clips can be found at **BibleStudiesForLife.com/AdultExtra**. Use the video clips as a follow-up to the question.

SESSION 6

ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER



The Point

Encourage people in their relationships with Christ and one another.

The Bible Meets Life

New parents certainly love their infant children, but they want to see them grow and mature. That child cannot grow without the assistance

of the parents and other caring adults. It's the same regarding our growth as Christians. We need each other. We have the opportunity to challenge and encourage others to grow spiritually and be all they can be in Christ.

The Passage

Acts 11:19-26

The Setting

Following the stoning of Stephen, the believers in Jerusalem faced increased persecution. Many scattered to various parts of the world. Some ended up in Antioch, the administrative center for the Roman province of Syria, 300 miles north of Jerusalem. Antioch was a busy port city, a center for luxury and culture, and home to a wide assortment of people. Its cosmopolitan population presented the scattered church an exciting opportunity to spread the gospel.

Acts 11:19-21

19 Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.

20 And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.

21 And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

KEY WORD

Grecians (v. 20)—Literally “Hellenists.” Describes the people who identified themselves with Greek culture, customs, and language. The term sometimes would have referred to Grecian Jews but here means Gentiles.

Encourage anyone and everyone to follow Christ.

1 ▶ Verse 19. Luke traced the backstory of the Spirit’s movement in Antioch to the stoning of **Stephen** when **the persecution** of the Christian believers intensified. The enemies of Christ may have ridiculed His followers by heckling, “Why didn’t God do something for Stephen if he was such a faithful man? Why serve a God like that?” However, God did do something for Stephen. He gave him grace to forgive his murderers and to pray for them (Acts 7:55-60).

Stephen’s spilled blood in Jerusalem seeded the missionary work by scattering believers who settled in faraway cities in **Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch**, all in predominantly Gentile lands. *Phenice*—Phoenicia—mainly encompassed the seacoast area of Syria, running about 100 miles from north to south and roughly 15 miles wide. Its major cities included Tyre and Sidon. *Cyprus*, an island situated off the coast of Asia Minor, had a large Jewish colony. Some of the believers from Jerusalem came to *Antioch*, a major city in the Greco-Roman world. Everywhere they went, they began **preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only**.

As the Jerusalem refugees came to new places, these believers quite naturally would witness at first to the Jews

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Bible Meets Life (PSG, p. 71)**. Highlight the author’s illustration about amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) and the ice-bucket challenge as something exciting that spread very quickly.

Reinforce the importance of encouraging one another by reading **The Point (PSG, p. 71): Encourage people in their relationships with Christ and one another**.

PRAY: Begin the Bible study with prayer. Ask God to help us be encouragers. Thank Him for the great encouragement He gives to us through the Holy Spirit.

STUDY THE BIBLE Acts 11:19-21



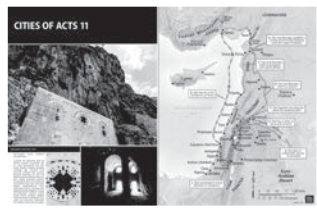
10 minutes

GUIDE: Before reading the passage, set the context by summarizing the information in **The Setting** on page 72.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read Acts 11:19-21

LEADER PACK: Point to
Item 6: Cities of Acts 11.

Use the map throughout the session as the Scriptures we study mention different cities.



GUIDE: Use **Bible Commentary 1** on page 73 and this page as well as **DIGGING DEEPER** on **PSG page 73** to provide background information about the scattering of the church and the beginning of the Spirit's work among the Gentiles that resulted from the persecution that had begun with the stoning of Stephen.

SUMMARIZE: Refer members to **PSG page 74** to the bullet points describing persecution of the church today:

(Continued on page 75.)

only. They would have found it odd that the gospel would have had any relevance for non-Jews, so they likely would have found it unnatural to share the gospel message with anyone except Jews. In so doing, the scattered Jewish believers followed the pattern established by the apostles in Jerusalem.

Verse 20. Those who journeyed farthest north at this point of the persecution arrived in Antioch. There, **some of them** took the bold step of **preaching the Lord Jesus** to Gentiles. Luke offered no clues as to the identity of these itinerant witnesses, only calling them **men from Cyprus and Cyrene**. Later he would identify five prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch, singling out “Lucius of Cyrene” (13:1). Some theologians believe Lucius may have been one of those who brought the gospel to the Gentiles in Antioch. The recent experiences in Jerusalem might have suggested a more cautious approach, yet they cast aside all restraint to preach the gospel to everyone who would listen. Because of this, the gospel finally broke the shackles of religious tradition and became good news for all people everywhere.

Significantly, they preached *the Lord Jesus* rather than “Jesus Christ.” This may seem like a trivial difference, but to present Jesus as Messiah to people who knew nothing of the hope of Israel would not have been an effective appeal. They used the Greek term for *Lord* because the people would have more readily understood this term due to its use in the Hellenistic world. ◀

Verse 21. Because the believers proclaimed the truth, the gospel exploded in Antioch, as the Gentiles **believed** the Christian message. **The hand of the Lord** referred to God's power as He enabled their work, and **a great number of Antioch's population turned to the Lord**. The verbs *believed* and *turned* summarized the response of faith, because faith demands turning to the Lord Jesus.

God by His sovereign power overruled the persecution of the believers in Jerusalem by scattering them to distant places. Despite being displaced, God worked in their lives and gave them grace to endure the hardship as they proclaimed the good news of Jesus. God overruled any temptation these believers may have had to adapt to the intoxicating culture of Antioch. God stirred them to witness and preach the gospel and caused the first Gentile church to be born.

We must not overlook the significance that God picked a cosmopolitan, morally corrupt city like Antioch to become

the missionary center of the gospel movement. In this secular, pagan environment, common Christians began telling the simple gospel message that Jesus came into this world to save sinners, and whoever believes in Him receives eternal life and forgiveness as God's free gift. These believers took this gospel, the power of salvation for the Jews, and shared it with pagan Gentiles, who also experienced the power of God for salvation.

We must not underestimate what God can do through ordinary followers of Christ. When we make ourselves available to the Holy Spirit, He will do extraordinary works through us. If we do not remain intentional about encouraging people to follow Christ, then we can easily slip into a routine of going through the motions of Christian discipleship without any sense of our responsibility to share the good news. The race is on, and the stakes are high.

Acts 11:22-24

22 Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.

23 Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

24 For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.

Encourage others to grow in their walk with Christ.

Verse 22. The news of large numbers of Hellenists coming to Christ reached the "mother church" in Jerusalem. As the church of the apostles, the Jerusalem church naturally would have shown interest in what was happening in Antioch. Although Peter had officially opened the door of the church to the Gentiles (Acts 10:1–11:18), the early believers, including Peter, had not fully foreseen the implications of the Holy Spirit's activity among Gentiles. They almost exclusively directed their efforts to reaching the Jewish population.

When the apostles heard about Philip's evangelistic ministry in Samaria, they sent Peter and John to investigate (8:14). Peter reported to the church in Jerusalem his interactions with Cornelius and his household and how they

- *Persecution of Christians has been routine procedure in China for decades, but believers still find ways to reach out to others. With no planned events or "church growth strategies," Chinese Christians continually have encouraged others to follow Jesus. It is estimated that up to 200 million people in China are followers of Christ.*
- *Christianity is increasingly being marginalized in the American culture. We may not yet be facing the degree of persecution experienced by the early Christians or believers in China, but we still can and should follow the example of these bold witnesses who talked about Jesus unashamedly..*

DISCUSS: Question #2
(PSG, p. 74): **Why do we sometimes shy away from certain groups of people when sharing the gospel?**

(Alternate: What about these verses do you find encouraging?)

TRANSITION: "In the next verses we'll see the church at Jerusalem send Barnabas to check on the new church in Antioch."

STUDY THE BIBLE

Acts 11:22-24



10 minutes

READ: Ask a volunteer to read Acts 11:22-24.

SUMMARIZE: Point out the three things Barnabas did upon arriving in Antioch (PSG, p. 75):

1. Barnabas saw the grace of God at work.
2. Barnabas rejoiced.
3. Barnabas encouraged them.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG pages 75-76** to see the character from which Barnabas's actions flowed:

- **He was a good man.** *We don't need more superstars; we just need some good men and women, people of character who treat others with love and dignity.*

(Continued on next page.)

had come to faith in Christ. Now the news about what was happening in Antioch created quite a stir and prompted the church leaders to dispatch someone to investigate.

At this critical juncture, the apostles **sent forth Barnabas** to investigate the preaching to the Gentiles. As a Levite and a native of the island of Cyprus, Barnabas proved to be a wise choice. He had a generous, godly, and warmhearted personality. Since some who had shared the gospel in Antioch were from Cyprus, Barnabas's sympathies likely would have been broader than those of Judean-born Jewish believers.

Barnabas had proven his ability to see both sides of an issue and to find middle ground for the two sides when he introduced Saul, the former persecutor of the church, into the circle of apostles (9:27). Barnabas fit the bill as one who could investigate the movement in Antioch and ease the concerns of those in Jerusalem who held that only the circumcised could receive the gospel.

Verse 23. Barnabas **was glad** when he arrived in Antioch and saw **the grace of God** in action. True to his name, Barnabas **exhorted** all who had come to faith in Christ, both Jewish and Gentile believers, **that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.** The word translated *exhorted* included a wide range of assurances including encouraging, advising, warning, and comforting. The Greek term for *cleave* means to hold fast to something; living in such a pagan environment required persistence, so Barnabas encouraged them to remain faithful to the Lord intelligently and *with purpose of heart*. The Greek means, "according to a set plan." They should not come simply to enjoy the fellowship, the great worship services, and the excitement of knowing the Lord. They needed to learn purposefully more about the Lord, to seek to know God in Jesus Christ through God's Word.

2 ▶ Verse 24. In describing Barnabas, Luke painted the spiritual profile of the kind of Christ-follower everyone would do well to emulate. He emphasized three characteristics.

1. Luke called Barnabas **a good man**, a term he used only one other time, in describing Joseph of Arimathea (Luke 23:50). *Good man* meant more than simply displaying good behavior. Barnabas obeyed the Word in his daily life so his character above reproach. He loved God, and he loved people. Barnabas got along with everyone, yet he was open and ready to investigate anything new.

2. Luke said that Barnabas was **full of the Holy Spirit**, meaning the fruit of the Spirit was evident in his life. He could readily impart the wisdom, understanding, and love of God. Barnabas lived this way not by virtue of his own nature but because he submitted fully to the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit and the Spirit's leadership.

When a person submits to the Holy Spirit's guiding influence, that person no longer simply trusts his own judgment, intellect, or training. Rather he has emptied himself and emulates Jesus in the way Jesus submitted Himself in the form of a bondservant. When an individual submits to the Holy Spirit, he becomes a servant of the Spirit's desires, impulses, and urges, and is empowered by the Spirit Himself, which produces spiritual fruit and supernatural results. We cannot overstate the importance of having Spirit-filled followers of Christ in a congregation because no church can ever rise above the spiritual vitality and spiritual maturity within the church.

3. A third way Luke described Barnabas was as a man full of **faith**, meaning he acted on what God said. He did not wait for his feelings or depend on the mood of the day. A person of faith will simply believe God and trust Him to act. Barnabas believed in the Lord and in His purpose and power to do whatever He willed and led him to do. ◀

Barnabas took God at His word and trusted the Lord unquestioningly. Because of his sterling example of character and faith as a man full of the Holy Spirit, the believers in Antioch were inspired to continue to reach even more followers for Christ as evidenced by the rapidly increasing numbers of converts: **much people was added to the Lord**.

When he came to Antioch, Barnabas fully expected God to lead him. With his eyes open to what God wanted him to see, he came to this city expecting God to give him the wisdom to handle whatever developed. Barnabas made a difference in Antioch because he came ready to serve as a man full of the Spirit and of faith. He encouraged people to grow in their faith. Any church would benefit by having people like Barnabas, who take time to invest in others. They serve as peacemakers without seeking credit for themselves.

We can encourage others to grow in their walk with Christ by taking the time to mentor them. We can begin by sharing our testimonies with them. Simply by telling how we came to Christ can help a believer grow. When we share our faith stories, we can encourage others to trust in Christ, and we can help those who have not shared their own testimonies to do so themselves. Another way we can encourage people toward spiritual maturity comes by modeling for them the spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible study, and service.

- **He was full of the Holy Spirit and faith.**

When Luke wrote the Book of Acts, he used a similar description for Stephen (6:5). It is a fitting description of a person who trusts God and lives surrendered to the power and work of the Holy Spirit.

Use **Bible Commentary 2** on page 76 and this page to further explain the character of Barnabas.

DISCUSS: Question #3
(PSG, p. 76): What captures your attention about Barnabas in this passage?

(Alternate: What are some practical ways we can help each other grow in our walk with Christ?)

TRANSITION: "Having checked on the fledgling church in Antioch, Barnabas now sought help to expand the work even further."

STUDY THE BIBLE

Acts 11:25-26



15 minutes

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Acts 11:25-26.

DISCUSS: Question #4 (PSG, p. 77): **When have you been challenged to leave your comfort zone as a disciple of Jesus?**

GUIDE: Use **Bible Commentary 3** to remind group members of the relationship that existed between Barnabas and Saul.

SUMMARIZE: Refer group members to **PSG pages 77-78** to see how we can follow the example of Barnabas:

1. Let the person watch.

When you're teaching and mentoring, start by modeling what to do.

For example, let the person observe you sharing your faith.

(Continued on next page.)

Barnabas likely encouraged spiritual growth as he modeled these disciplines. We can also spur on spiritual growth by modeling holy living. By contrast, we can actually quench the Spirit by sinful living.

Acts 11:25-26

25 Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul:

26 And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

Encourage others to serve Christ.

3 ▶ Verse 25. Barnabas quickly assessed that he needed help to ground the great number of new believers in Antioch in doctrine and practice. He knew exactly who he needed for the job, so he went **to Tarsus, for to seek Saul**.

Choosing the former persecutor of the church was radical, but Barnabas knew Saul's background and leadership were exactly what was needed. Barnabas had a significant influence on Saul's early life as a believer (Acts 9:26-30). However, as many as 10 years had passed since that time. Saul had returned to Tarsus. In those intervening years, the Holy Spirit taught Saul many lessons. Barnabas was convinced this former persecutor turned preacher was right for the task ahead in Antioch. ◀

Verse 26. After the Holy Spirit had prepared Saul for the assignment in Antioch, He sent Barnabas to Tarsus to find Saul. When he found him, Barnabas brought Saul to Antioch, ready for a lifelong ministry that would change the course of human history.

Barnabas and Saul **assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people**. They taught the believers in Antioch intentionally and systematically for **a whole year**. They certainly would have taught them the foundational truths about God, the uniqueness of Jesus and His love, what it meant to follow Jesus, and about the character of God and the sinfulness of man. They must have pointed to the

sufficiency of Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross, the necessity of believing Jesus is the only way to eternal life, and about the urgency of eternity because all people will either spend forever in heaven or forever in hell.

Furthermore, they equipped the believers in Antioch to scatter the gospel across cultures. In a cosmopolitan city like Antioch, they would have had the opportunity to influence the world with the gospel. So Barnabas and Saul likely discipled the believers so that they would be able to communicate humanity's problem—sin—and God's gift of salvation through Jesus' death and resurrection.

Just as Barnabas and Saul likely taught these early believers to talk about these things in their everyday conversations, we need to speak about forgiveness and freedom in Christ in our everyday conversations. The believers came together regularly for worship, encouragement, prayer, and instruction. They helped one another grow in spiritual maturity, and in so doing, they encouraged one another to serve Christ. We need to take what they experienced and apply it to our lives so we can help one another grow in Christ.

We would do well to contemplate the last sentence in verse 26, **The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch**. Apparently, the Antioch believers enjoyed talking about Christ all the time, wherever they went, to anyone who would listen. The pagans in Antioch knew all about these people. These believers would not keep quiet about their faith, and they proclaimed it wherever they went.

It's not hard to imagine how this *Christian* moniker may have originated because the believers apparently talked about Jesus Christ all the time—while shopping at the market, while watching athletic events, while working in shops and in the fields. Christ was the focus of their lives. He was the One who forgave them and who was the Source of their lives. The term was one Gentiles likely would have used to refer to their fellow Gentiles who had become believers; it also revealed that Christianity was beginning to have an identity of its own, rather than being viewed as simply a Jewish entity.

"Who are these people?" one Antiochian would ask another as unofficial missionaries talked about Jesus wherever they went. The answer would be, "Oh, these are the people who are always talking about Christ. They are the Christ-followers, the *Christians*." The members of the Antioch church apparently had a well-earned reputation for being "Christ-talkers."

If someone described your church by the main topic of the members' conversations, for what would your church be known? Wouldn't it be great if your church was known for its conversations that pointed people to Christ?

2. **Serve together.** *Let the person participate and lead right alongside you.*
3. **Hand off.** *Let the person do the task or ministry on his/her own. You've mentored, trained, and guided. Now let the person run with it, but always be there with encouragement and praise.*

DISCUSS: Question #5

(PSG, p. 78): What are some advantages in doing God's work together?

(Alternate: What opportunities exist in our church for serving and encouraging others?)

DO: Invite volunteers to share responses to the activity on **PSG page 78: "Encouraging Others."**

LIVE IT OUT



5 minutes

GUIDE: Emphasize **The Point:** Encourage people in their relationships with Christ and one another.

REVIEW: Review **Live It Out** (PSG, p. 79; see text to the right). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

WRAP IT UP

GUIDE: Emphasize the importance of encouraging others to grow in our relationships with Him.

PRAY: "Father, help us to be encouragers like Barnabas was to so many in the early church."

NOTE: Remind group members that **PSG pages 6-9** are there to journal one another's prayer requests.

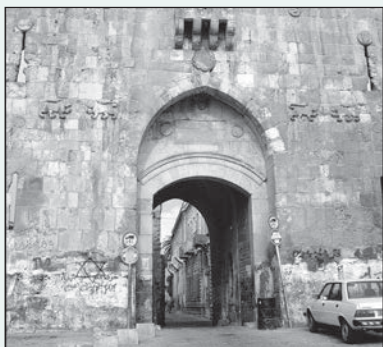
LIVE IT OUT

We are surrounded by people who need encouragement. What will you do to encourage others to grow in Christ and serve Him? Choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **A note of thanks.** Identify one person who has encouraged you. Write a note to him or her and express your gratitude for the help and encouragement.
- ▶ **A word of encouragement.** Take time this week to encourage someone in their walk with Christ. Make a call, write a note, or come alongside the person you know who needs a word of support.
- ▶ **A relationship of encouragement.** Develop an ongoing relationship with someone that includes regular meetings. Mentor the person in a particular area of life and encourage his or her growth in Christ.

Are you ready to see encouragement and support go viral in your church? In your community? If so, you can be the catalyst by choosing to encourage those around you to grow in Christ and grow together as the body of Christ.

BIBLICAL
ILLUSTRATOR



The Lion Gate at the old city of Jerusalem. This is also called Saint Stephen's Gate, as tradition holds that Stephen was stoned in this region.

Tertullian, a second-century theologian, referred to the blood of the martyrs as being the seed of the church. By this, he meant that every time the church began to experience persecution, it began to grow stronger spiritually and numerically.

Jewish leaders stoned Stephen to death (Acts 7:54-60). Afterward, Jewish persecution against the Christians intensified. As a result, many Hellenistic Christians opted to flee to other parts of the empire rather than remain in Jerusalem.

Not only Hellenistic Christians but *Jewish* Christians scattered from Jerusalem to other parts of the Roman Empire (8:1,4). Acts 11:19-26 describes the growth that occurred as a result of this persecution and scattering.

Historian Robert Baker said, "The martyrdom of Stephen marks a turning point in two respects: it began the persecution that drove the Christians out of Jerusalem into all Judea and Samaria in their witness; and it profoundly moved Saul the persecutor in the direction of personal conversion to Christ."

Certainly these two turning points profoundly shaped Christianity's future, but how? The scattering of the church decentralized the church, shifted the emphasis to reaching the Gentiles, and propelled the missions movement of the church.

The excerpt above is from the article "When God Scattered His Witnesses" (Spring 2011), which relates to this session. More *Biblical Illustrator* articles are available that relate to this session. See page 7 about *Biblical Illustrator*.

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

Once we have come to know God through repentance and faith, we have the wonderful privilege of encouraging one another in our faith.

Each week, make yourself available either before or after the session to speak privately with anyone in your group who wants to know more about becoming a Christian. See the article, "Leading Someone to the Greatest Decision of All," on page 2 for guidance in leading a person to Christ.

Remind group members that **page 2** in the **PSG** offers guidance in how to become a Christian. Encourage believers to consider using this article as they have opportunities to lead others to Christ.

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Free additional ideas for your group are available at
BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra