**Live in Community**



Small Group Study

**Volume Overview**

**Better Together**

Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. ([Ephesians 4:3](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Eph4.3))

*The Christian life is never lived alone. When we become Christians, we’re adopted into God’s family. We’re welcomed into a community. We’re meant to live and grow in faith together. But that takes humility and intentionality. We grow together as we pray and study Scripture together. We bear responsibility for one another by our encouragement and our honoring of those in authority. God is growing us together into one body, one family.*

**Session Overview**

**Welcome Others**

**Biblical Encounter:** Barnabas Stands Up for Paul ([Acts 9:19–30](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac9.19-30))

**Outcome:** Include new believers as they abandon their past and pursue a new life in Christ.

*In this session we encounter Barnabas and Paul (his Hebrew name, Saul, is used in this passage). Following Paul’s conversion, we see how Barnabas included Paul, even though Paul was persecuting the Church prior to his conversion. Some people didn’t believe that Paul had a genuine change in his life. As believers we are to include and champion new believers. This can be difficult to do, especially if we are familiar with their past. The role we play is helping them to pursue their new life in Christ.*

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| *First time leading* Live *for Adults? Check out the* [Facilitator Guide](https://0b769b0ed3569ef9d18b-f88d8272f61086866d50d048b43ef630.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/sites/biblengagementproject/Listen_Facilitator_Guide.pdf)*.* |

To access session content and videos from a computer, visit: [BibleEngagementProject.com/downloads](https://bibleengagementproject.com/downloads)

**Engage**

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| **QUESTION**  Share about a time when you had an over-the-top “five-star experience.” |

When you think of a five-star experience, you might think of a luxurious vacation, expensive restaurant, or over-the-top customer service. It’s those special perks and attention to details that really wow us. But if you think about it, what it really boils down to is thoughtfulness.

Unfortunately, we live in a world that doesn’t always show thoughtfulness. But the truth is, we shouldn’t have to board a plane or pay an outrageous fee to have a five-star experience. As Jesus’ followers, we should be showing this kind of thoughtfulness to people in our world every day. We should be showing God’s over-the-top love to everyone around us. Jesus even reminded us that our love for each other will prove that we’re His followers ([John 13:35](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Jn13.35)). As believers, we should always be ready to practice genuine hospitality ([Romans 12:13](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ro12.13)) and welcome others into our life.

**Watch**

As we watch this video, think about your answer to this question: Who has been encouraging to you on your faith journey? Why do they stand out to you?



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**Consider What the Bible Says**

When you think about the apostle Paul, what comes to mind? You may think about how he wrote almost half of the books in the New Testament. But he was also a church planter, missionary, and preached in prisons. Today we’ll look at Paul’s life following his transformational encounter with Jesus ([Acts 9:1–18](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac9.1-18)). That makes it important to understand who Paul was before he became a follower of Jesus. Believers knew him as a religious Pharisee who rejected Jesus and hated Christians.

Because Paul (whose Hebrew name, Saul, is used only in [Acts 8–13](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac8-13)) had been so harsh toward Christians, people had a hard time believing that he had really changed after he encountered Jesus. Many Christians experienced poor treatment and punishment under his leadership ([Acts 8:3](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac8.3)). So, it’s easy to understand why some people were still afraid of him.

But Paul’s encounter on the road to Damascus had completely changed his understanding of Jesus. Thankfully, believers in the Early Church were willing to love Paul. They were willing to take a risk and trust what Jesus was doing in his life. These believers were there to welcome Paul, support him, and defend him.

**Believers Welcomed Saul**

Read [Acts 9:19–21](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac9.19-21).

(*For the backstory on Saul’s previous actions, read verses* [*1–18*](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac9.1-18) *as well.)*

Saul’s life-change was immediate! His previous conflict against the followers of Jesus turned into proclamations of Jesus as the Son of God. Saul took that message into the place he knew was built to talk to people about God—the synagogue. In that Jewish place of learning, Saul began his earliest work in trying to convert his fellow Jews. His amazing turnaround left some of them befuddled. Who goes from imprisoning believers in Jesus to convincing others to believe in Jesus?

Thankfully, one group of believers offered Saul a safe place to stay. They welcomed him into their homes. That kind of welcome typically included feeding him and giving him a safe place to sleep. It was an opportunity for Saul to get his bearings around others who had put their faith in Jesus. They were good examples for us, as they looked beyond his past and gave him the chance to belong.

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| **QUESTION**  If you had experienced Saul’s transformation, how long would you have waited to start preaching? |

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| **QUESTION**  Imagine if you were asked to offer your home to Saul at that point in his faith journey. What hesitations would you have? |

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| **QUESTION**  How do you see the Church welcoming someone like Saul today? |

**Believers Provided Safety for Saul**

Read [Acts 9:22–25](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac9.22-25).

Saul was speaking out about Jesus’ death and resurrection. But not everyone welcomed his message. There was even a plot to kill him. What an interesting turn of events in Saul’s life! The one who hunted down Christians was now being hunted as a Christian.

When the plan to kill him was discovered, Saul’s new friends came up with a plan of their own. We know they saved his life to further his ministry. But we can imagine that their show of support would have also given Saul the courage to continue. Such a kind gesture surely helped Paul know for sure that he wouldn’t be facing this new life of faith in Jesus alone.

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| **QUESTION**  Why were the Jews plotting to kill Saul? |

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| **QUESTION**  How do you think Saul felt to now be on the opposite side of Christian persecution? |

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| **QUESTION**  If Saul had asked you for help, how would you have responded? |

**One Believer Stood Up for Saul**

Read [Acts 9:26–30](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac9.26-30).

Saul’s ministry was soon to expand. He traveled nearly 135 miles from Damascus to Jerusalem. Unfortunately, the believers there didn’t roll out the red carpet for him. They were still afraid. After all, he had quite a violent reputation, so it probably seemed wise to be cautious. While it was natural to question whether his life transformation was real, it was also a sign that these believers allowed their fear to cause them to be less than kind.

One of the believers in Jerusalem was a man named Barnabas. He saw the challenges that Saul was facing and decided to help. He took a stand and used his influence to affirm what God was doing in Saul’s life. Barnabas opened the door to a safe place to stay for Saul. His actions also connected Saul with the apostles, which led to him joining their preaching team. Barnabas’s warm welcome and stamp of approval opened the door for Saul to be where every believer should be—in community with other believers.

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| **QUESTION**  Many of the believers were having a hard time looking beyond Saul’s past. Are there certain sins in someone’s past that would make it hard for you to trust them? |

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| **QUESTION**  Were there others who vouched for you when you were a new believer? |

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| **QUESTION**  How can you offer your voice in support of new believers today? |

**Did You Know?**

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| *The important role that Barnabas played in the Church is often overlooked due to the significant focus of the Book of Acts on the missionary journeys of Paul: Barnabas was only present for the first one. But did you know that Barnabas was influential in the Early Church long before Paul was ever saved? ([Acts 4:36](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac4.36)) Barnabas was the leader of that first missionary journey. Paul came along to assist him. This is supported by what happened to them in city of Lystra (*[*Acts 14:8–20*](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac14.8-20)*). The locals believed Paul and Barnabas were the incarnation of Greek gods with Barnabas being the chief god Zeus and Paul being Hermes, the messenger god for Zeus and the other Greek gods.* |

**Reflect**

**Include new believers as they abandon their past and pursue a new life in Christ.**

Without the support of those first believers, Paul might have given up. Plenty of people wanted to shut him down. Thankfully, Paul found a welcoming and supportive Christian community, not just fearful rejections. We can’t underestimate how much their love and encouragement meant to Paul as he left behind his entire way of life.

When we think of all that the apostle Paul has meant to the Christian faith, we can’t forget that those who welcomed and encouraged him had a huge part to play. Today, we may never fully know what a simple act of hospitability and encouragement can mean to a new believer. And who knows what amazing gifts they may offer to the mission of Jesus as they mature!

**Listen to God**

Let’s pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

**Personal Reflection Questions**

*Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.*

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| **QUESTION**  Can you name a new believer who you are currently welcoming into your circle of influence? How are you welcoming them? |

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| **QUESTION**  How has this session challenged you to respond to new believers? |

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| **QUESTION**  What hesitations do you have about welcoming new believers? What must you do to move past those hesitations? |

**Activate**

Being welcoming and supportive of a new believer takes intentionality and thoughtfulness. First, it requires keeping your eyes open for someone who is new in their faith. Second, it requires you to make a connection and commit to be actively involved in their life. It means being full of grace, patience, and encouragement. You might not be ready to support every new believer that you know, but you can start with one new believer.

**Challenge**

Take steps this week to connect with and encourage a new believer. Consider using the steps below as you begin and continue your journey of being a welcoming and supportive Christian.

• Identify a new believer. Reach out to them in person, via text, or over the phone.

• Invite a new believer to coffee or a meal (your treat) with the intent of hearing their story. Ask questions and find out how you can pray for them in the future.

• Send a new believer an encouraging text or typed prayer that you are praying for them.

• Invite a new believer to join you in a weekly activity (gym, social gathering, church event, etc.).

• Invite a new believer to sit with you in church or join you in your small group. Introduce them to other Christians you know.

• Start a Bible reading plan with a new believer and study the Bible together.

• Encourage a new believer to get involved and start serving at your church.

• Become a true friend.

**Prayer Requests**

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| Note any requests from the group and pray together. Also remember to pray for them during the week. |

Because it’s important to listen to God through His Word both in community and individually, continue this study through the personal devotions that have been provided as an extension of this discussion.

**Live on Your Own**

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| *Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.* |

**Day 1: Barnabas Stands Up for Paul**

Read [Acts 9:19–30](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac9.19-30).

Look back over Live in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven’t already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

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| **QUESTION**  Are you prepared to make your life more welcoming to new believers? |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 2: Celebrate with New Believers**

Read [Luke 15:3–7](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk15.3-7).

The Parable of the Lost Sheep proves how truly precious every person is to Jesus. In the parable, upon finding the lost sheep, the shepherd throws a party. Jesus used this story to illustrate how heaven responds when a person’s life is transformed. If that is the response of heaven, it should cause us to think about our response to new believers. Rather than question the authenticity of their life change or focus on their past, we should celebrate with every new believer. We can celebrate that the old life is gone, and a new life has begun ([2 Corinthians 5:17](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.2Co5.17)). We should echo heaven’s party and be the first to welcome them into God’s amazing family.

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| **QUESTION**  Describe the reaction that takes place in heaven when a person turns their heart to Jesus. |

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| **QUESTION**  What does celebrating with new believers look like for you? Who celebrated with you when you became a believer? |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 3: Pray for New Believers**

Read [Colossians 1:9–14](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Col1.9-14).

Paul knew firsthand just how important it was to have the support of a trusted community. In his letter to the believers in Colosse, Paul wanted them to know that they were being supported in constant prayer. It’s evident that Paul wanted these believers to be successful and his prayers proved that. Paul asked God to give them spiritual wisdom and understanding. He prayed that their lives would honor God and produce incredible results. His prayer was for them to grow deeper in their relationship with God and be filled with joy. Paul showed us that welcoming new believers involves our daily prayer for them.

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| **QUESTION**  How do you feel when you know that someone is praying for you? How might a new believer feel to know that you were praying for them regularly? |

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| **QUESTION**  What kinds of prayers should you be praying for new believers? Make a list of two or three things that you can pray for new believers. |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 4: Encourage New Believers**

Read [Acts 18:24–28](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac18.24-28).

In today’s reading, we meet Apollos, an enthusiastic new believer. Apollos wanted so badly to communicate the truth of the Scriptures to those in Ephesus. There was only one problem: he didn’t know the whole truth. Rather than shutting him down, Priscilla and Aquila took Apollos aside and helped him understand more about God. The believers in Ephesus also encouraged him in his future ministry. Their encouragement and letter of recommendation opened the door for Apollos to assist Paul in developing believers in the capital of Achaia, Corinth ([1 Corinthians 3:5–6](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.1Co3.5-6)). Without a doubt, their encouragement was like fuel for the fire that Apollos had burning to tell about Jesus.

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| **QUESTION**  Who has been the most encouraging person in your spiritual walk? What have they said or done that has been so encouraging? |

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| **QUESTION**  Read [Hebrews 10:23–25](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Heb10.23-25). How can you personally encourage others and motivate them toward acts of love and good works? |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 5: Share Your Life with New Believers**

Read [1 Thessalonians 2:7–12](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.1Th2.7-12).

Maybe you’ve heard it said before: “Love is spelled T-I-M-E.” While new believers need our support through prayer and encouragement, they also need time with us. Paul highlights that he loved the Thessalonian believers so much that he shared his life with them ([1 Thessalonians 2:8](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.1Th2.8)).

New believers are trying to grow in their new life with Jesus. Filled with hundreds of questions, new believers need people who will patiently sit with them and help them find the right answers. New believers may need to engage in new activities, habits, and hobbies. New believers need solid Christ-honoring friendships. New believers need small group leaders and mentors who will contribute to their spiritual growth.

Sharing your life means making space and time for new believers. New believers can’t wait to hang out in your living room. New believers can’t wait to join you at your favorite coffee shop. New believers can’t wait to work out with you at the gym. New believers are anxiously waiting to be part of your life. Are you ready to let them in?

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| **QUESTION**  Think of those who have shared their life with you in your spiritual walk. What have they done that has been so welcoming and encouraging? |

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| **QUESTION**  What would you have to change in your lifestyle or schedule to be more available to new believers? |