

# ACTS: Encouraging Discipleship

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St. Barnabas is known as “the encourager.” He supported St. Paul in missionary work and was present when disciples in Antioch were called “Christians” for the first time. Encouragers don’t give up. Throughout the bible, we learn it’s a character trait of believers.

**Acts 11:22-26** — News of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast devotion; for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were brought to the Lord. Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for an entire year they associated with the church and taught a great many people, and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called ‘Christians’.

### For Personal Study

In December 2004, a massive earthquake shattered the floor of the ocean and sent towering waves across the sea. The devastating tsunami killed multitudes and impacted the lives of millions. None of us will forget the images on television. Then, just months later, Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast and disaster took on new meaning within our own nation.

Yet a more damaging cultural earthquake has taken place in our world. People are lost and confused. Who can be trusted? Where is there safety? Does anyone care about anyone else?

We are living in a “post-Christian” culture; a culture that is no longer built on Judeo-Christian values, a culture that does not even factor our Christian world view

into its perception of truth. This does not sound too encouraging.

In the first century, as the word traveled from city to city about Peter’s new understanding that the Gospel was meant for all people, fresh excitement stirred among the believers in Jerusalem. They sent Barnabas to Antioch to help believers in that city reach out to non-Jews with the message of salvation through Jesus.

Barnabas was known for his encouraging influence. Sending Barnabas to the mission field was like sending spiritual fuel to the tiny flame of Christian outreach that had begun.

Maybe you know someone like Barnabas who inspires you to go forward in doing good for your own wellbeing and for others; who offers words of

hope, laughter, light-heartedness, and comfort. Someone who attentively listens or pitches in to meet a need.

Intentionally be a “Barnabas” this week. Encourage others in your own unique way. It could prompt a neighbor or co-worker to consider “I want to have what they’ve got!” — *Jesus!* You will bring aid to those who are lost and hurting amid the rubble of a cultural earthquake.

### Readings & Questions



Turn to page 2 for more inspiration and learning, on your own or in a group!

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## Readings & Questions for Daily Discovery or Group Discussion

### Monday, July 10

2 Thessalonians 2: 16-17;  
Hebrews 10:23-25

Jesus is the ultimate source of our encouragement. When have you especially experienced this?

### Tuesday, July 11

1 Thessalonians 5:11

What are you currently doing that is an encouragement to others?

### Wednesday, July 12

Job 4:3-5; Hebrews 3:12-14

Even the encourager needs to be encouraged. Who encourages you? How does this impact you?

### Thursday, July 13

Proverbs 16:23-24

Words have power. How did your words affect others in the past day?

### Friday, July 14

1 John 4:11-13

Our actions and attitudes show forth the Spirit of God and the character of Jesus to the world. How will you help others "see" our encouraging, loving God today?

## God's Church in Action

### One year after the tsunami: *a journey of healing and hope*

On **December 26, 2004**, the day of the terrible South Asia Tsunami, young Rangit (pictured here) was at home in the coastal village of Sothikuppam, India. Rangit clutched his baby sister as the powerful waves crashed around them, but could not keep hold.

His sister's death and Rangit's own near-death left him severely traumatized. Rangit was withdrawn and could not speak. Like so many other survivors, Rangit's physical injuries could be treated, but the emotional injuries he carried were just as threatening to his health.

The United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India, with gifts from ELCA International Disaster Response, worked with a community agency to train over 1,400 local leaders in trauma counseling. The participants, many of whom are teachers, learned to recognize the signs of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in children. Then, through an innovative program of counseling, songs, dance and art therapy, they helped the children and their parents begin to recover.

The tsunami's waves will forever shape this boy's life, but today Rangit is talking again and even smiles and laughs. Through your gifts to ELCA International Disaster Response and the capable ministry of our partners in India, Rangit has progressed on his journey toward health, healing, and wholeness.



*The people of St. John have supported a multi-year post-tsunami recovery effort through the ELCA Disaster Fund. In the coming year, we will also explore ways to help local families recover in the midst of a "cultural earthquake." Pray about how we can reach out to our neighbors in Howard County, offering hope in Christ.*