

MAIN POINT

As we continue to learn about the attributes of a missional life, the next characteristic we come to is boldness. In Acts 9, we read about two different believers in the early church who demonstrated why boldness is an important element of the missional life. Through his acceptance of Paul, Barnabas exemplifies living in faith boldly, while Paul—at this time a new Christian—goes on to speak God’s truth boldly.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Describe the most bold thing someone you know has done. Why was it a bold move? What did it accomplish? How did your opinion of that person change after he/she exhibited boldness?

Do you consider yourself a bold person? What’s the boldest thing you’ve ever done for God? How would you describe your relationship with Him at that time?

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 9:26-27.

Why did the Jerusalem Christians fear Paul? How do you think you would have reacted to Paul if you had been there?

How did Jesus change Paul’s life? Look back at Acts 9:1-18 for the story of Paul’s conversion.

The Jerusalem Christians’ fear of Paul was understandable. He had been present at Stephen’s death and had sought to arrest Christians. In fact, when he later gave his testimony, he described how he had imprisoned many Jesus followers and voted for the death sentence for others (Acts 22:4-5; 26:9-10). If Paul was only pretending to act like a disciple, he could’ve destroyed the church.

Why was Barnabas willing to stand up for Paul? What was Barnabas risking by doing so?

Who has taken a risk on you? Who gave you your first opportunity to serve Jesus? What was the result?

Apparently Barnabas saw evidence of God's work in Paul's life and recognized Paul as a true disciple and brother in the Lord. Consequently, Barnabas demonstrated his bold faith when he took Paul to the apostles—perhaps only Peter, James, and John (see Galatians 2:9). By endorsing Paul, Barnabas risked his reputation and his life.

How would things have been different if Barnabas hadn't been there to stand up for Paul?

When do we need to take risks either to include others in community or to lead them to greater devotion or service in Christ? What impact would more Barnabas-like boldness have on the Chets Creek community?

> HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 9:28-31.

As a result of Barnabas's defense, the apostles accepted Paul into their fellowship, and they opened doors of opportunity for him to minister and spread the gospel in Jerusalem. Boldness characterized Paul's evangelism.

How were Paul and Barnabas's acts of boldness similar? How were they different?

What are some synonyms for "bold" that might help us better understand Paul's testimony about Jesus?

What characteristics of Paul's ministry were evident in the beginning (vv. 29-30)? Based on what you know about Paul from the New Testament, how prominent were these traits in his lifelong ministry? Read Acts 28:31 for insight.

The Greek word translated *spoken boldly* stresses Paul's confidence in his new faith. To speak in the name of Jesus meant to speak with His authority. God opened Paul's eyes to see how the Old Testament Scriptures spoke of Jesus. Paul was able to use that theological truth powerfully and confidently to express his faith.

Read Ephesians 6:19-20. Based on these verses, do you think Paul struggled to be bold in his faith? Why or why not?

Read Acts 9:31 again. What was happening in the church during this time? Which of these do we most need to experience in Jacksonville? How might we boldly help make it a reality?

Acts 9:31 ends the account of Paul's conversion. With that watershed event, the early persecution of Christians also ended. The church experienced peace, the Spirit's encouragement, and numerical growth.

NEXT STEPS

Leave your group with these parting thoughts, designed to put action to the truths learned and re-emphasize the principles from your meeting time.

Why do you think God values risk? What do we communicate to God when we take risks, like both Barnabas and Paul, to make His name known?

What barriers keep us from sharing the gospel with boldness? If we are not demonstrating boldness in our faith, what should we ask ourselves?

How does a person become a witness with “complete boldness”?

What are some practical steps toward boldness that you can take today? How can we encourage and support one another to live sent with boldness this week?

PRAY

To close your group time, split up into smaller groups of 2-3 people, or into groups of men and women. Give the groups time to discuss each person's prayer concerns, focusing specifically on areas where bolder faith and courage is needed. Encourage the groups to pray for each person, asking God for the courage to take risks and a greater awareness of the need to be dependent on Him.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up e-mail to your group with some or all of the following information:

- ☐ Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - **Are you content with the level of boldness at which you live for Christ? Why or why not?**
 - **What is a bold step of faith you can take today?**
- ☐ The challenge to memorize Ephesians 6:19-20.
- ☐ A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.

CHETS CREEK CHURCH**LIVING SENT**

BOLD (ACTS 9:26-31)

PAUL IN JERUSALEM (ACTS 9:26-31)

9:26 Unable to refute Paul in debate, the Jews plotted to kill him. His disciples helped him escape from Damascus (vv. 23-25). Paul traveled south to Jerusalem and attempted to associate with the disciples there—the Christian community. He sought to be attached to them, to be known as one of them. Understandably, they were all afraid of him. After all, shortly before this time he had persecuted the Jerusalem church, hunting down and imprisoning believers (see 8:3). The disciples did not believe his commitment to Christ was genuine; they thought it was a trick to enable him to capture them. They seriously doubted he was a genuine disciple.

9:27 Barnabas, “Son of Encouragement,” took a tremendous risk. He was a respected believer whom the disciples trusted. He had generously contributed to Jerusalem Christians’ needs (see 4:36-37). Barnabas took Paul to the apostles—the Twelve. Convinced Paul was a genuine believer, Barnabas was willing to act as a mediator with the apostles. The Greek text will allow the explanation in the latter part of the verse to be Barnabas’s or Paul’s words. The explanation recounted Jesus’ appearing to Paul on the road to Damascus, their conversation, and Paul’s bold preaching about Jesus in Damascus.

9:28 The apostles accepted Paul into their fellowship. That he was coming and going with the apostles indicates his full identification with them. The implication may be they opened doors of opportunity for him in Jerusalem. He was speaking boldly about Jesus in Jerusalem’s synagogues, mainly in those of the Greek-speaking Jews.

9:29 Paul conversed and debated with the Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) Jews. Paul took up Stephen’s work and likely advocated Stephen’s view that the gospel is for every person. Paul’s background as a Jew who was born and had lived in a Gentile area, Cilicia, equipped him to speak to and debate with these Jews. If Paul had debated with Stephen, that experience—coupled with his viewing the manner in which Stephen died—doubtless had a profound effect on him.

The Hellenistic Jews reacted to Paul as they had responded to Stephen: they attempted to kill Paul. His claims for Christ enraged the synagogue members; they considered him to be a traitor to Judaism and sought to eliminate him.

9:30 Members of the Christian community discovered the plot to kill Paul. These believers escorted him to Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast, where he boarded a ship bound for Tarsus, his native city in Cilicia. Paul’s name does not resurface in Luke’s narrative until Acts 11:25, in events of about 10 years later. Paul demonstrated his intense commitment by going to Jerusalem and meeting with the disciples. In addition, he preached about Jesus and risked his life by debating some Greek Jews about Jesus.

9:31 This verse marks a significant point in the development of the early church. The church, having been forced by persecution to scatter outward from Jerusalem, was at peace in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. This set the church up for a second stage of growth, which would see the gospel boldly taken outside Israel.