God wants us to encourage each other to follow Jesus.

Bible Verse
“Follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2:21b).

Growing Closer to Jesus
Children will
- learn that Barnabas was a friend to Saul,
- understand that God calls us to encourage others,
- experience what it means to be encouraged, and
- practice affirming others.

Teacher Enrichment

Bible Basis
- Barnabas encourages Saul.

Acts 4:26-31
Despite Saul’s amazing conversion, the Christians in Jerusalem remembered him as a dangerous enemy of the church. So when Saul returned to Jerusalem intending to join the disciples there, he found many closed doors. Few could believe that a man who’d been so vehemently opposed to Christianity could change and embrace it. But Barnabas believed. He came alongside Saul, befriended him, and told others of Saul’s miraculous conversion. Gradually other Christians began to accept Saul as well. When the Jews again tried to kill him, Saul fled to Caesarea and then on to Tarsus. Saul’s new Christian friends had again saved him from death.

Like Saul, the 5- and 6-year-olds in your class often face discouragement. When children are told they’re too small to participate in an exciting activity, when friends are unkind, or when intentions are misunderstood, children need an encouraging friend nearby. It’s important to show children that God wants us to encourage and build others up. Even young children can learn to affirm and befriend others, just as Barnabas did. Use this lesson to help children understand that God calls us to encourage others.

Prayer
- Read Romans 1:12.
- Reflect on how the faith of others is encouraging to you.
- Pray: Dear Lord, help me encourage others in their faith through my words and actions. Help me especially to understand when a child acts out that an affirming word can heal a hidden pain.
### Before the Lesson

- Collect the necessary items for the activities you plan to use, referring to the Classroom Supplies and Learning Lab Supplies listed on the chart.
- Make photocopies of the “Today I Learned...” handout (at the end of this lesson) to send home with your children.
- Pray for the children in your class and for God’s direction as you teach the lesson.

### This Lesson at a Glance

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*See the end of this lesson for extra-time ideas and supplies.*
Welcome Time

**SUPPLIES:** “Butterfly Name Tags” (p. 24), markers, pins or tape

- Bend down and make eye contact with children as they arrive.
- Greet each child individually with an enthusiastic smile.
- Thank each child for coming to class today.
- As children arrive, ask them about last week’s “Today I Learned…” activities. Ask questions such as “How did you celebrate Jesus’ resurrection?” and “Who did you tell the good news that Jesus is alive?”
- Say: **Today we’re going to learn that God wants us to encourage each other to follow Jesus.**
- Hand out the butterfly name tags children made during Lesson 1, and help them attach the name tags to their clothing. If some of the name tags were damaged or if some of the children weren’t in class that week, have them make new name tags using the photocopiable handout.
- Direct children to the Let’s Get Started activities you’ve set up.

Let’s Get Started

Set up one or more of the following activities for children to do as they arrive. After you greet each child, invite him or her to choose an activity.

Circulate among children to offer help as needed and to direct their conversation toward today’s lesson. Ask questions such as “When has a friend encouraged you?” or “What encouraging things do people say to you?”

**Option 1: Affirmin’ Muffins**

**SUPPLIES:** English muffins, strawberry cream cheese, cinnamon hearts, M&M’s candies, plates, plastic knives

Set out plastic knives, M&M’s candies, cinnamon hearts, bowls of softened strawberry cream cheese, and English muffin halves. Let children spread strawberry cream cheese on the English muffins and then make happy faces with the cinnamon hearts and M&M’s candies. Talk about how encouraging words make us feel happy. Explain that **God wants us to encourage each other to follow Jesus.** Have children make enough muffins for each child to have one. Set the treats aside until the Closing.

**Option 2: Magnetic Personalities**

**SUPPLIES:** magnets, metal cans, nonmagnetic items

On a table, set out kitchen magnets, alphabet and craft magnets, metal cans, and children’s railroad trains that connect with magnets (such as Brio train sets). Mix in items that are not magnetic, such as pine cones, paper, stuffed animals, or ceramic items. As children experiment with the magnets, talk about how encouragement pulls us together.

**WARNING:** MAGNETS—This activity uses magnets. Swallowed magnets can attract each other through opposing intestinal walls, causing serious infection or even death. Seek immediate medical attention if magnets are swallowed or inhaled.
Lesson 9

**Option 3: Bubble Buddies**

*SUPPLIES:* bubble solution, bubble wands, plastic six-pack holders

If weather permits, take children outside. Place a bowl of commercial bubble solution on the ground. Allow children to blow bubbles with bubble wands or to dip and wave plastic six-pack holders to create large bubbles. Have children fill the air with bubbles. Then explain that just as a few people made lots of bubbles, Saul and his helpers brought lots of people into the church. Tell children that God wants us to encourage each other to follow Jesus.

When everyone has arrived and you're ready to move on to the Bible Story Time, encourage the children to finish what they're doing and get ready to clean up.

**Pick Up Our Toys**

*SUPPLIES:* CD player

Lead children in singing “Pick Up Our Toys” (track 2) with the CD to the tune of “Skip to My Lou.” Encourage children to sing along as they help clean up the room.

If you want to include the names of all the children in the class, sing the song without the CD, and repeat the naming section. If you choose to use the CD, vary the names you use each week.

![Singing](track 2)

**SING**

We will pick up our toys.
We will pick up our toys.
We will pick up our toys,
And put them all away.

There's [name] picking up toys.
There's [name] picking up toys.
There's [name] picking up toys,
Putting them all away.

(Repeat.)

**Bible Story Time**

**Setting the Stage**

*SUPPLIES:* glasses, baking soda, vinegar, tablespoon

Before class begins, place a tablespoon of baking soda in a glass and three tablespoons of vinegar in another glass. Set the glasses on a table out of sight.

Tell the children you'll clap your hands to get their attention. Explain that when you clap, children are to stop what they're doing, raise their hands, and focus on you. Encourage children to respond quickly so you'll have time for all the fun activities you've planned.
Form a circle, then say: **We’re going to conduct an experiment to see what happens when we mix two different things together.** Bring out the two glasses and pass around the glass with the vinegar. **Smell this cup with the vinegar in it. It smells sour!** Let’s pretend the vinegar is like a sad person. Pass around the glass with the baking soda in it. **Now smell the cup with the baking soda in it. It doesn’t smell like anything.** Let’s pretend the baking soda is a cup of kind words. What do you think might happen if we mix a sad person with kind words? Pause for children to respond.

Pour the vinegar into the baking soda as children watch.

Ask: • **What happens when we give kind words to sad people?** (They get happy; they bubble up, too; they aren’t sad anymore.)
  • **How do you feel when someone says or does something nice to you?**
    (Happy; better; like that person must like me; like I want to be nice, too.)

Say: God wants us to encourage each other to follow Jesus. God wants us to sprinkle happy words and actions on others so they can bubble up with joy! Today we’ll hear what happened when someone encouraged Saul. Let’s get ready to hear the happy story right now!

### Bible Song and Prayer Time

**SUPPLIES:** Bible, construction paper, scissors, CD player, basket or box

Before class, make surprise cards for this activity by cutting construction paper into 2x6-inch slips. Prepare a surprise card for each child plus a few extras for visitors. Fold the cards in half, and stamp the “Good News” stamp inside one of the surprise cards. Bookmark Acts 9:26-31 in the Bible you’ll be using.

Have children sit in a circle. Say: **Now it’s time to choose a Bible person to bring me the Bible marked with today’s Bible story.** As we sing our Bible song, I’ll pass out the surprise cards. Don’t look inside your surprise card until the song is over.

Lead children in singing “Read God’s Book” (track 3) with the CD to the tune of “The Muffin Man.” As you sing, pass out the folded surprise cards.

**SING**

Now it’s time to read God’s book,<br>Read God’s book, read God’s book.<br>Now it’s time to read God’s book.<br>Let’s hear a Bible story.<br>(Repeat.)

After the song, say: **You may look inside your surprise cards. The person who has the newspaper stamped inside his or her card will be our Bible person for today.**

Identify the Bible person. Ask the Bible person to bring you the Bible. Lead the class in clapping for the Bible person, cheering, and making fun applause sound effects by slapping your thighs with your palms. Help the Bible person open the Bible to the marked place, and show children where your story comes from. Then have the Bible person sit down.
Say: [Name] was our special Bible person today. Each week we’ll have only one special Bible person, but each one of you is a special part of our class! Today we’re all learning that God wants us to encourage each other to follow Jesus.

Let’s say a special prayer now and ask God to teach us about his call to encourage others. I’ll pass around this basket. When the basket comes to you, put your surprise card in it and say, “God, teach me to encourage others to follow Jesus.”

Pass around the basket or box. When you’ve collected everyone’s surprise card, set the basket aside, and pick up the Bible. Lead children in this prayer: God, thank you for the Bible and all the stories in it. Teach us today to encourage others to follow Jesus. In Jesus’ name, amen.

### Hear and Tell the Bible Story

**SUPPLIES:** Bible

Say: Today we’ll hear about a man named Barnabas who was a good friend to a man named Saul. To remind us of Saul’s special friend, find a partner to be your Barnabas Buddy during the story. When you find a Barnabas Buddy, sit down together:

Help children form pairs, making sure each child feels welcome in a group. Open your Bible to Acts 9:26-31, and show children the words. Say: Our Bible story comes from the book of Acts in the Bible. When you hear the name Barnabas, give your Barnabas Buddy a high five, a handshake, or a pat on the back.

The story begins with a man named Saul, who used to be mean to people who loved Jesus. Saul and some of his friends were so mean that sometimes they even killed people who loved Jesus. Barnabas was not one of those friends.

One day God spoke to Saul and changed Saul’s heart. God taught Saul to love Jesus. Saul learned to follow Jesus, and he was kind to others. In fact, Saul wanted to tell everyone about Jesus!

Many people were still afraid of Saul, and they ran away from him. They thought he might still be mean. But not Barnabas! He believed in Saul and became his very good friend. Barnabas knew that God had the power to change people’s hearts, so he encouraged Saul.

Barnabas told others that they could trust Saul. Barnabas introduced Saul to the other disciples. Because of Barnabas’ encouragement, Saul finally made friends with other Christians in Jerusalem. These new friends even helped Saul escape when his old friends tried to come back and hurt him. Those people still didn’t love Jesus, and they didn’t want Saul to love him either.

Saul’s life was changed because he was encouraged by Barnabas. He went on to teach people all over the world about God’s Son, Jesus. The church became stronger because of Saul—and because he was encouraged by Barnabas.

Ask: • Why were people afraid of Saul? (Because he’d been mean to Jesus’ followers; they remembered all the bad things he’d done.) • How did Barnabas encourage Saul? (He believed in him; he helped other Christians accept him; he said kind things about him.)
• What happened because of Barnabas’ encouragement? (Saul could preach about Jesus; more people believed in Jesus; the church grew stronger.)
  Say: God used Barnabas to encourage Saul and help him make new friends in Jerusalem. Those friends later helped Saul escape, so he could go tell more people about God. ►God wants us to encourage each other to follow Jesus, too. God wants us to be like Barnabas to those around us.

Do the Bible Story

SUPPLIES: Bible

Say: This game will give you and your Barnabas Buddies a chance to encourage others. Have the Buddies link arms.
Hand out the rainbow glasses to two pairs of kids and say: When you’re wearing these glasses, you can see special qualities in everyone, like a superhero encourager! Keep your arms linked and hop to another pair of Buddies. Tell that pair something you like or appreciate about them, such as “We’re glad you’re here today” or “You both have super smiles!” Then give them your rainbow glasses, link arms with them, and hop to another group. When everyone is linked together, we’ll form a circle. Ready? Go!

You may need to help children come up with unique and meaningful affirmations.
When everyone has been affirmed and is standing in a circle, collect the rainbow glasses and ask:
• What was it like to encourage others? (Kind of hard; I think they liked it.)
• What was it like to be encouraged? (Great; cool; fun.)
• Why does God want us to encourage others? (Because it makes them feel good; it’s one way to show God’s love; it helps people do God’s work.)

Say: Tell your Barnabas Buddy one person you want to encourage to follow Jesus this week. Pause while children share. Remember, Saul turned his whole life around and became a follower of Jesus. So can we! We can tell others that Jesus wants to be their forever friend, too. Jesus loves us so much that he gave his life for us so we can live with him in heaven some day.

Open your Bible to 1 Peter 2:21b, and show children the words. Say: Our Bible verse from 1 Peter 2:21b tells us to ►”Follow in his steps.” We can follow in Jesus’ steps, and ►God wants us to encourage each other to follow Jesus, too. Now let’s sing about following Jesus.

Lead children in singing “Following God Hokey Pokey” to the tune of “The Hokey Pokey.” This song is not on the CD.
Lesson 9

**SING**

You put your (right hand) in (put your right hand in the circle),
You put your (right hand) out (put your right hand outside the circle),
You put your (right hand) in and you shake it all about. (Put your hand into the middle of the circle and shake it.)

You want to follow Jesus so you turn your life around. (Turn in place.)
That's what it's all about. (Clap on each word.)

Additional verses:
(left hand)
(right leg)
(left leg)
(head)
(whole self)

Say: It's so fun to do things together, especially when we encourage each other. God wants us to encourage each other to follow Jesus every day!
Let's visit our special friend Pockets to see if she's been encouraging anyone.

**BIBLE POINT**

**Closing**

■ Learn to Affirm

**SUPPLIES:** cinnamon hearts

Before children arrive, fill the plastic eggs with cinnamon hearts.
Place the eggs in Pockets' pouch. Bring out Pockets the Kangaroo and go through the following puppet script. When you finish the script, put Pockets away and out of sight.
**Pockets:** *(Bouncing and exuberant)* I’m so happy to be here today! I learn so much and I love my friends!

**Teacher:** That’s wonderful, Pockets. We’re glad you’re here, too! Do I hear something rattling in your pouch?

**Pockets:** You sure do! I brought a special treat to share with my friends. Will you help me give it to them?

**Teacher:** Of course, Pockets. What did you bring?

**Pockets:** Well, I always leave class feeling so full of good things that I decided to fill these plastic eggs with good things to show how I feel.

**Teacher:** *(Carefully opening the plastic eggs)* How nice! Let’s carefully pass these around and let everyone take one. *(While children are passing the eggs around, Pockets can continue.)*

**Pockets:** Do you know what I love about my friends here?

**Teacher:** No, what do you love?

**Pockets:** I love to hear them sing songs to Jesus.

**Teacher:** I do, too. They have nice voices don’t they?

**Pockets:** Yes! And I like their giggles and smiles.

**Teacher:** Me, too.

**Pockets:** I can tell they love Jesus. And they share Jesus with me, so I can learn how to live like God wants me to.

**Teacher:** Pockets, you’re so full of encouraging words! Children, how does it feel to hear Pockets’ encouraging words? *(Allow a few children to share their responses.)* Would anyone like to tell what he or she likes about Pockets? *(Allow a few children to say encouraging words about Pockets.)*

**Pockets:** Wow! It’s good to hear all those nice things! I like encouraging people and seeing everyone smile. Now I want to go home and tell my family some encouraging things, too. Goodbye, everyone!
Lesson 9

Expressing Encouragement

SUPPLIES: Affirmin’ Muffins from Option 1, CD player

Say: Pockets’ visit made me so happy that I feel like singing! Let’s sing about helping and encouraging others, just as Barnabas did.

Lead children in singing “Spread the Good News” to the tune of “Old MacDonald Had a Farm” with the (not on CD).

SING

Spread the good news everywhere (clap in rhythm),
Jesus is alive! (Pat alternating knees.)
Take the good news here and there (clap in rhythm),
Jesus is alive! (Pat alternating knees.)
Step-step-hop (step, step, hop),
Don’t be slow. (Turn around in place.)
Right foot, left foot (step with your right foot and then your left foot),
Do-si-do! (Fold arms and step in a backward circle.)
Spread the good news everywhere (clap in rhythm),
Jesus is alive! (Pat alternating knees.)
(Repeat.)

Say: Now let’s enjoy the Affirmin’ Muffins some of you made in the beginning of class. As you eat them, remember that kind words make people smile! Distribute the snacks, and then pray: Dear God, help us to be encouragers like Barnabas. Thank you for these muffins and the friends that you’ve given us in class. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Growing closer to Jesus extends beyond the classroom.

Photocopy the “Today I Learned…” handout (at the end of this lesson) for this week, and send it home with your children. Encourage parents to use the handout to plan meaningful family activities to reinforce this week’s topic.
For Extra Time
If you have a long class time or want to add additional elements to your lesson, try one of the following activities.

- **Lively Learning: Jingling Encouragements**
  Gather children in a circle, and give one child the smile beach ball. Ask children to think of ways to encourage each other to follow Jesus. Tell them to shout out an encouraging statement when they think of one, such as “Be nice to your friends” and “Say your prayers.” Instruct the person with the smile beach ball to gently toss the ball to someone who has made an encouraging statement. Play until everyone has had a chance to throw the smile beach ball at least once.

- **Make to Take: Growing Tree**
  Have children go outside and collect twigs. Inside, give each child a fistful of clay and show him or her how to place a twig in the clay; then press the clay to a paper plate. Set out green tissue paper and bowls of glue. Have children tear small leaves from the tissue paper and glue them to the twig to make trees. As children work, remind them that just as their trees are “growing,” the church grew because of Saul’s work and Barnabas’ encouragement.

- **Treat to Eat: Buddy Bagels**
  Split bagels in half, and then cut them in half again to make “smiles.” Have children spread strawberry jam on the bagels to make red lips. Before children eat, have them say an encouraging word to the person on their left. Explain that kind words make us smile.

- **Story Picture: Barnabas Encourages Saul**
  Give each child a photocopy of the “Today I Learned...” handout. Place several cotton swabs, paper towels, cups of water, and cupcake tins filled with powdered, sweetened drink mix on the table. Let the children paint the picture by dipping the cotton swabs in water and then in the drink mix. As the children work, talk about how sweet encouraging words are.
Verse to Learn
“Follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2:21b).

Ask Me...
- How was Barnabas a friend to Saul?
- What can you say to encourage a friend?
- What happens when our family uses kind words?

Family Fun
- Have each family member write his or her name on an uninflated balloon, and then exchange balloons. Instruct each person to give a word of encouragement each time he or she blows into the balloon. Children will see how kind words build people up. Help younger family members tie off the balloons.

Barnabas Encourages Saul (Acts 9:26-31)