

BEYOND BEYOND

Youth Session : The Cooperative Program – A Program of Encouragement Acts 4:32-37

by Dr. Dennis Hooper

Teaching goal: This lesson is intended to demonstrate how the Cooperative Program can be an encouragement to the contemporary church just as Barnabas was an encouragement to the early church.

Stewardship emphasis: Youth can be involved in encouragement through giving.

Teaching plan

Heads-up preparation:

Needed:

- Posters from previous session, if desired
- Fun-size candy bars or treat for class
- Containers for candy, 2
- Bible
- Bible dictionary

1. Read about Barnabas in a good Bible dictionary. His name means “Son of Encouragement.”
2. Read Acts 1-4.
3. Buy fun-size candy bars or some other treat for the entire class. Make sure you have enough. Separate the candy into two containers. Put a smaller amount (about a fourth of the class) in one container. Place the rest in another container located where the students will not see.
4. Make sure the posters from session one are still available and displayed prominently in the room. If you are teaching this lesson only, the posters should say: *Worship, Faith, Love and Obedience*.

Session Outline

- I. Welcome and announcements (10-15 min.)
Announcements and introduction of lesson to the large group.
- II. Discussion outline (30-45 min.)
For large or small groups
 1. Our needs awareness is encouraging.

2. Our personality and giftedness are encouraging.
 3. Our gifts are encouraging.
- III. Wrap-up and closing prayer (5-10 min.)

Welcome and announcements

Make whatever announcements from youth ministry and the church the students need to know. Remind them you are in an emphasis called BEYOND. Make sure the students have all been welcomed and are part of the group.

Begin by introducing the lesson. In the study for this session from Acts 4:32-37, the church was in the early days of development. There were many new converts to the faith. Most of them were very poor. The church was struggling in the area of finances, but was growing in faith and numbers.

Read the key passage of Acts 4:32-37.

Activity option: Buy individual fun-sized candy bars. Give them out to the youngest students only. Tell the class there were just not enough in the budget for everyone. Encourage the students who have candy bars not to open them until after the class. This activity will be completed toward the end of the lesson.

Discussion

1. Our needs awareness is encouraging.

Scriptural understanding: Remind the students that the early church was doing very well in spiritual matters. Read Acts 4:32-35. After the resurrection of Jesus and the empowering of the Holy Spirit, the disciples had become very busy sharing the good news of Jesus. God was blessing in a very special way. It was an exciting time to be part of the early church.

The church was unified. The church was spiritually powerful. Yet there were needs—big needs. The church of Jerusalem struggled with having enough financial support.

Barnabas saw the need of the church. He wasn't the only one who saw the need. Because the need was great, the early church had to give sacrificially. They shared what they had.

Application point: Barnabas was an encouragement because he saw the needs of the church. We, too, can be an encouragement by recognizing the needs of the church. Every local church has needs. Ask the students to identify some of the needs of the local church. The church in the United States and Canada also has needs. Many places are without a church that preaches and teaches the gospel in a clear way. The worldwide church also has needs.

One way we can see and meet needs is to support the Cooperative Program through our gifts and offerings each week. When everyone gives to the church, it strengthens the church family and provides for the needs.

Share with the students that it is important, just as in the early church, that everyone sees the need. It is especially important for youth to see the needs. Ask how students might be able to recognize needs in the local church, North American churches and churches worldwide.

Activity Option: Ask the students who did not receive a candy bar to hold up their hands. Ask them how they felt about not receiving a candy bar. After there are some complaints about not being fair, remind them the budget was not sufficient for everyone to have a candy bar.

2. Our personalities and giftedness are encouraging.

Scriptural understanding: Barnabas was known as the “Son of Encouragement” to the apostles and church. His name was Joseph (v.36). Throughout his ministry, he offered encouragement to the church. He encouraged the apostle Paul. The gift Barnabas gave was reflective of his personality and giftedness. Gifts are encouraging. Some needs are never met. Many needs can be met through generous giving.

Application point: Everyone is known for something, good or bad. Barnabas was known for encouragement. Churches are known for something. How can the youth in the church be known as a group that encourages? Give students an opportunity to answer.

Activity option: How discouraging is it that everyone didn’t get a candy bar? Allow the students to answer. Tell the students the candy bars are just a symbol of the needs of the local and worldwide church. Many needs aren’t being met. Barnabas and the others did what they did to provide and be an encouragement.

3. Our gifts are encouraging.

Scriptural understanding: When they laid the gifts at the apostles’ feet, they were placing their gifts in the care of and at the disposal of the early church. The church was in its infancy. It would be difficult for the early church to imagine Christianity would spread all over the world and have billions of followers. Only heaven knows how much encouragement that gift gave to the early church. It is not far-fetched to say we heard the gospel because of gifts given such as the ones Barnabas and others gave.

Application point: Ask the students how our gifts encourage Christians here and around the world. Then ask them how our gifts could encourage non-Christians to come to know Christ. Make sure, “By giving them a chance to hear the gospel” is part of the leaders or students answer.

Wrap-up and closing prayer

If you have been teaching in small groups, reassemble the large group. Tell the students that the candy was just a way of illustrating the needs of the early church. Ask the following questions: “If it were up to you, would you have given candy to the entire group?” “How did you feel when you received and the others did not?” “Which is more sacrificial, providing for a few or providing for all?”

After the students have answered the questions, give the rest of the students a candy bar. Tell them the sacrifice to buy enough for everyone was not actually that great. The point is it did cost more to provide for everyone. Share with the students that the purpose of the church is to share the good news of Jesus with everyone. Our gifts working together can do a much better job of providing an opportunity to share that message with everyone. Southern Baptists do that through the Cooperative Program. Churches designate a percentage of their offering to the Cooperative

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Program where it is then used to support missions and more, locally, within your state, within North America and worldwide.

Point to the four posters of *Faith, Obedience, Love* and *Worship*. Ask the students, “Which of these did Barnabas demonstrate?” Encourage the students to describe how each of these are applicable to Barnabas and to us.

Give students an opportunity to share where they have placed their *BEYOND* cards with the dime attached, if they have not yet had an opportunity to share.

Close in prayer.