



## Reading through the New Testament—Week 21

May 28-June 3

Reading Plan available on  
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### *Becoming* more like Jesus—growing in His Word

As we read this week's section in Acts 12-16, we read about times when God's people were persecuted for sharing the message of Jesus. In the early church, persecution took various forms including physical abuse, imprisonment, and even the threat of death.

But what about today? Are Christians persecuted today? A few years ago, Christianity Today published an article entitled, "The 50 Countries Where It's Most Dangerous to Follow Jesus in 2021"

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/january/christian-persecution-2021-countries-open-doors-watch-list.html>)

Here are a few highlights from that article:

- Every day, 13 Christians worldwide are killed because of their faith.
- Every day, 12 churches or Christian buildings are attacked.
- Every day, 12 Christians are unjustly arrested or imprisoned, and another 5 are abducted.

The article goes on to say, "The numbers of God's people who are suffering should mean the Church is dying—that Christians are keeping quiet, losing their faith, and turning away from one another. But that's not what's happening. Instead, in living color, we see the words of God recorded in the prophet Isaiah: 'I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert'" (Isa. 43:19, ESV).

For Christians being persecuted (wherever they are), here are a few things you might consider:

1. **Love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44).**
2. **Remember that Christ is head of the Church, not Caesar.**
3. **Be confident and trust God.**

## THIS WEEKEND'S SERMON OUTLINE

### “Wow! What a Hit!”

*Acts 9:26-31 and Acts 15:36-41*

*“The words people say to us not only have shelf life but they have the ability to shape life.” – Bob Goff*

**Acts \_\_\_\_.** *“Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means ‘son of encouragement’), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.” (vv. 36-37)*

- Barnabas encouraged the early church by investing his own \_\_\_\_\_.

**Acts \_\_\_\_.** *“But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles.” (v. 27)*

- Barnabas encouraged Saul by investing himself \_\_\_\_\_.

**Acts \_\_\_\_.** *“Set apart for me **Barnabas** and **Saul** for the work to which I have called them.” (v. 2)*

*“As **Paul** and **Barnabas** were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath.” (v. 32)*

- Barnabas encouraged Paul by investing in his \_\_\_\_\_.

**Acts \_\_\_\_.** *“They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus.” (v. 39)*

- Barnabas encouraged John Mark by investing himself \_\_\_\_\_.






Consider:

- To whom are you a Barnabas?
- Who has been a Barnabas in your life?
- To whom can you invest yourself in?
- Is there someone in your life who invested in you that you could go back and say “thanks”?

“Encouragement” (French) – **“to put heart into you.”** God, through His Son Jesus, has put His heart in \_\_\_\_\_.

## New Testament in a Year—May 28-June 3

Acts

Chapter 12  13  14  15  16 

### **Additional Reflections** from this week's reading

**Chapter 12.** After Peter's miraculous escape from prison, he went to a house where he knew many people had gathered and were praying (including praying for him). When he knocked on the door, the person who recognized his voice knew it was Peter but didn't open the door. When she told the other people in the house that Peter was at the door they didn't believe her. How often have you prayed for something, but then acted like it's not something that would ever happen?

**Chapter 13.** We know that Barnabas is referred to as "son of encouragement." Barnabas demonstrates this in several ways, one of which was taking Saul (later called Paul) under his wings. In the chapters prior to chapter 13, and including chapter 13, Barnabas and Saul are mentioned several times. But notice that in 13:42, the order of their names switch. From then on, most of the times the two of them are mentioned it is no longer Barnabas and Paul, but Paul and Barnabas. By putting Paul's name first, what does Luke (the author of Acts) signal to us about these men?

**Chapter 14.** What does Paul emphasize about God in his speech in vv. 15-17?

**Chapter 15.** At the end of the chapter, we read where Paul and Barnabas have a disagreement over John Mark. Luke tells us that they had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. While disagreements aren't usually a positive thing, what is one good thing that resulted by Barnabas and John Mark going in one direction and Paul and Silas in another direction?

**Chapter 16.** As you read this chapter and particularly what happened to Paul and Silas, if you were falsely accused, severely beaten, and thrown into a dark jail for openly sharing your faith, would you still trust in God?

## *Belonging* in Community

Connect Groups are a group of Christians who meet together regularly where we intentionally share in our faith walk. Connection is created through commitment and presence in fellowship, discussion, and prayer.

- Begin your time together by following up on anything that was shared during your last time together.
- Take some time to share any reflections of aha's you had from your reading.

This week we learned through the person of Barnabas and were prompted to consider what it is to be an encourager and to be invested in someone's life.

- What were key points that stuck with you in the sermon from this past week?
- What role has encouragement played in your life?

Sometimes our actions and thoughts prevent us from receiving encouragement. There are plenty of philosophies as to why that is. Whatever the reason, being built up by our Christian family is a key part of God's design. We aren't meant to be alone and giving and receiving encouragement is one way to form connection and support.

- It is easy, hard, or does it vary in how you receive encouragement?
- What are ways that you receive encouragement?
- What are ways that you give encouragement?

One final thought. Encouragement is a powerful weapon against the lies we receive that are meant to tear us down and separate us. Who is someone you are feeling separated from? How can you encourage them?

Close in prayer and encouragement for one another.

## *Blessing* the World

### **Want To Make An Impact?**

Vacation Bible School is quickly approaching. Have you thought about volunteering but haven't signed up? This is a great event to serve in a new capacity that can have a great impact on the children of St. Michael, ESM, and our neighborhood as they grow in their connection with Jesus.