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2026 ANNUAL THEME: “Hope in Motion” →

BIBLE STUDY

April 29, 2026

**“Empowerment Communities:
Ministry Misunderstandings and Miscommunications”
(Acts 15:37-40)**

Topics

- Scripture Reference
- Reflection Questions
- Important Emphasis
- Key Terms and Definitions
- Outline
- Introduction
- Background and Context
- Explore The Text
- Check For Understanding
- Life Application

Scripture Reference (Acts 15:37-40 NASB)

³⁷ Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. ³⁸ But Paul was of the opinion that they should not take along with them this man who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. ³⁹ Now it turned into such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. ⁴⁰ But Paul chose Silas and left after being entrusted by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.

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Reflection Questions

1. What are some things that can cause disagreements to arise even among faithful believers working toward the same goal?

2. How can differing perspectives strengthen or challenge a ministry community?

Important Emphasis

The **Joy** that we find in **Jesus** is priceless!

Joy defined

Joy is the state of delight and well-being that results from knowing and serving God! Joy is found over 150 times in scripture, if we include the variations of the word joy this is increased to over 200 times. **Nehemiah 8:10b** and **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**

“Joy is described as the outward sign of inward faith in the promises of God. Joy is the infectious and uncontainable fruit of divinely inspired growth. It’s a deeply entrenched, unshakable belief, the result of sustained right thinking and dwelling on the nature and character of God.” Tommy Newberry

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Renewal of Joy

As the children of God we must be very careful to protect our minds. This is the place where we house our thoughts. No area of your life is untouched by your thoughts. We are what we think! **Proverbs 23:7, Psalm 51:12**

In the church today there is a need for a revival of joy in the work and an insatiable hunger for the transformative word of God! We need to upgrade our “joy software” and “eliminate destructive emotions”. This joy must become contagious in our ministerial work daily! **Hebrews 12:1**

Today let us make a decision never again to settle for anything less than real joy!

Meaningful Ministry

What is Ministry? It is serving (*sharat* in Hebrew and *Diakonos* in Greek)! Who are we serving? We must serve the Lord first and then serve others in the spirit of the Lord. **Matthew 22:37-40, Matthew 6:33, Genesis 12:1**

Muddy Waters of Ministry

The Book of Acts is packed with the actions of the Apostles through the divine works of the Holy Spirit. In **Acts 15:36-41** the Apostle Paul is engaged in the divine work of God with Barnabas the *son of encouragement*. The context of this text reveals that Paul and Barnabas are doubling back to check on the spiritual condition of those believers in whom they had a religious dispute over circumcision (**Acts 15:2**).

- **The Word was Shared**
- **The Welfare was Significant**
- **The Wedge was among the Saints**

Paul and Barnabas along with John Mark and Silas were on their way for a second missionary journey and there was a miscommunication in ministry. The question given rise to was who should we take on the Mission? This was an intense sticking point! Paul did not want to take John Mark. There was **Desertion, Disagreement and Dismissal** and in all this, **God’s work will get accomplished!** Eventually these issues could not be avoided but they needed to be resolved. **Philemon 1:24**

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“as do Mark” three words of kingdom care and kingdom progress bathed in forgiveness! (2 Timothy 4:11)

Key Words and Terms

Contention
Differences
Disagreements.
Disputes
Empowerment
Joy
Ministry
Miscommunication
Misunderstanding
Mission
Perspectives
Priorities
Providence
Reconciliation

Outline

- I. Perspectives: Understanding Differences
- II. Priorities: Choosing the Mission
- III. Providence: Trusting God’s Outcomes

Introduction

Disagreements are a natural part of any community, including those committed to serving God. Even among the early church leaders, passionate followers of Christ found themselves at odds over important decisions. Acts 15:37-38 presents a pivotal moment when Barnabas and Paul, both pillars of the early church, disagreed about whether to include John Mark in their ministry journey. This disagreement was not about doctrine, but about trust, reliability, and the future of their mission.

Such moments challenge us to consider how we manage conflict within our own faith communities. Do we allow disagreements to divide us, or can we find ways to

grow stronger through them? This study explores how God can use even our differences to empower us, refine our mission, and ultimately accomplish His purposes.

Background and Context

The events of Acts 15 occur after the Jerusalem Council, where early church leaders resolved a major doctrinal dispute about Gentile believers. Soon after, Paul and Barnabas planned to revisit the churches they had established. Barnabas wanted to bring John Mark, his cousin, who had previously left them during a difficult part of their journey (Acts 13:13). Paul, however, felt that Mark’s earlier departure made him unreliable for the demanding work ahead.

This disagreement was so sharp that Paul and Barnabas parted ways—Barnabas took Mark to Cyprus, while Paul chose Silas and continued his mission elsewhere (Acts 15:39-41). Despite the conflict, God used both teams to spread the gospel further. This episode reminds us that even when believers disagree, God’s providence can turn division into multiplication for His kingdom.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

I. Perspectives – Understanding Differences (Acts 15:37-38)

³⁷ *Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also.*

³⁸ *But Paul was of the opinion that they should not take along with them this man who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.*

Acts 15:37-38 shows that Barnabas and Paul had different opinions, creating a clear disagreement between them.

A. Barnabas Backs Bringing John Mark

Barnabas, known as the “son of encouragement, saw potential and redemption in John Mark” (Acts 4:36). He wanted to take John Mark along with him and Paul.

B. Paul Protests Pamphylian Parting

Paul, focused on the mission's demands, prioritized reliability. He was of the opinion that they should not take along with them this man [John Mark] who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.

Both perspectives had merit, and both leaders acted out of conviction and love for the ministry. **Romans 14:1-4** reminds us not to judge one another over disputable matters, but to accept one another as God has accepted us.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, known as the "Prince of Preachers," upheld Paul's decision to refuse a "faint-hearted deserter," while acknowledging Barnabas's right to seek restoration. He emphasized that both men had right on their side, leading to an unavoidable separation.

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| CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING |
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1. How do the differing perspectives of Barnabas and Paul regarding John Mark reflect broader themes of grace versus accountability in Christian leadership?

2. In what ways does the reference to Romans 14:1-4 and Spurgeon's commentary challenge readers to reconsider their own responses to conflict and restoration, especially when both sides appear to have valid convictions?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

II. **Priorities: Choosing the Mission** (Acts 15:39)

³⁹ Now it turned into such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus...

The disagreement forced both Paul and Barnabas to clarify their priorities.

A. **Steadfast and Strong**

For Paul, the mission's success depended on a reliable team. He suffered numerous challenging and life-threatening experiences that clearly indicated the need for a missionary team that was steadfast and strong.

- Paul faced frequent persecution, including being imprisoned multiple times for preaching the gospel.
- He endured physical violence, such as being beaten with rods, stoned, and left for dead.
- Paul experienced dangerous journeys, including shipwrecks and threats from robbers.
- He often encountered opposition from both religious leaders and hostile crowds.
- Paul suffered from hunger, thirst, and exposure during his travels.
- He dealt with the emotional and spiritual burden of caring for new believers and churches under pressure.

B. Believer's Benevolence

For Barnabas, nurturing and restoring a fellow believer was paramount.

After Paul's dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus, many disciples in Jerusalem were afraid of him and did not believe he was truly a disciple.

In **Acts 9:26-27**, Barnabas demonstrated benevolence and mentorship by taking Paul, bringing him to the apostles, and recounting how Paul had seen the Lord and preached boldly in Damascus. Barnabas's willingness to vouch for Paul and introduce him to the early church leaders was a pivotal act of encouragement and restoration, reflecting his nurturing spirit.

Sometimes, God uses disagreements to help us focus on what matters most. **Philippians 1:15-18** shows that even when motives or methods differ, Christ can still be preached, and God's work can advance.

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3. How did Paul's emphasis on having a steadfast and reliable team influence his decision-making when preparing for missionary journeys, especially in light of the challenges and dangers he faced?

4. In what ways did Barnabas's commitment to nurturing and restoring fellow believers shape his approach to choosing companions for the mission, particularly regarding his support for John Mark?
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EXPLORE THE TEXT

III. Providence – Trusting God's Outcomes

⁴⁰ But Paul chose Silas and left after being entrusted by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.

A. Providence in Painful Partings

Although the split between Paul and Barnabas was painful, God's providence turned it into an opportunity for greater ministry impact.

B. Redemption in Relational Rifts

Two teams now covered more ground, and John Mark eventually became a valued partner to Paul (**2 Timothy 4:11**). God can redeem our conflicts and use them for His glory. **Romans 8:28** assures us that God works all things together for good for those who love Him.

Lessons from Barnabas and Paul: Navigating Leadership Differences with Grace

Barnabas and Paul, both gifted leaders in the early church, exemplified distinct strengths—Barnabas as an encourager and advocate, and Paul as a passionate, bold, and intellectually deep missionary. Despite their shared commitment to spreading the gospel, they experienced disagreements, such as over John Mark's participation in ministry. Their example demonstrates that even the most dedicated and Spirit-filled leaders can have differences,

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yet they manage conflicts with grace, respect, and a focus on the greater mission, modeling godly ways to navigate disagreements within ministry.

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

5. How did God use the disagreement and separation between Paul and Barnabas to further His purposes, and what does this teach us about trusting God's providence in difficult situations?

6. What lessons can we learn from the way Barnabas and Paul managed their leadership differences, and how can these lessons guide us in resolving conflicts within our own communities or ministries?

Life Application Questions

- How can you respond constructively when you disagree with someone in your ministry or faith community?
- What steps can you take to trust God's providence when outcomes are uncertain or relationships are strained?