

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Comfort, Encouragement, Exhortation and Advocacy

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“According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the standard of faith; ⁷ if service, in service; if teaching, in teaching; ⁸ if exhorting, in exhortation” Romans 12:6-8

“Joseph, a Levite and a Cypriot..., whom the apostles named Barnabas, which means Son of Encouragement.” Acts 4:36

“Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.” 1 Timothy 4:13

“But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.” Hebrews 13:22

Some people refer to a spiritual *gift of exhortation*, while others refer to a *gift of encouragement*. In reality, **they are simply two different English translations of the same Greek word, *paraklēsis***. This word occurs 29 times in the NT, while the verbal form, *parakaleō*, occurs 109 times. A related term, *paraklētos*, occurs another 5 times. So, the concept occurs fairly frequently in the NT scriptures. The verb, *parakaleō*, means “I call alongside”, ...the noun, *paraklēsis*, refers to a “summons” a “calling-near” of someone, ...and the noun, *paraklētos*, refers to “one who is called alongside”. It is evident that they are related words. **What is important to realize, however, is that these terms can have a very wide range of meaning, depending on the context.** For example, to “call someone alongside” can vary widely from to “urge, entreat, or even beg”, to “invite, summon, or call”, to “admonish, charge, or exhort”. The word picture can move from giving “comfort and consolation”, to offering “help or assistance”, to “instructing, encouraging or challenging” someone. **The translation or interpretation of the Greek word is significantly colored by the translator’s personality, understanding of leadership, or “ministry” in general.** If a person has an authoritarian view, he may prefer to think in terms of “exhort” or “admonish”. If he has a servant-leadership lens, he may prefer terms like “encourage” or “instruct”. Another translator may be drawn to more relational terms, like “urge, comfort, or console”. **There is no definitive way to prove what is the correct understanding of the word, unless something else in the context helps to make it more clear.**

The key ingredient of someone with this gift is this “coming-alongside” dynamic. They either invite someone to come alongside, or they entreat them to come alongside, or they admonish them to come alongside. Usually, they are recruiting someone to listen to them for encouragement, instruction or confrontation. The presence of the supportive, encouraging, challenging person in the life of the one being helped is a tell-tale sign of an encourager/exhorter. **They are always urging/inviting or challenging someone to join with them, meet with them, or spend time with them, so they can minister to that person.**

We see this dynamic at work in the life of Barnabas. His given name was Joseph, but he earned the name, “Barnabas”, which means Son of Encouragement, ...or Son of “Calling-Alongside”. **Barnabas was always engaging with other people, inviting them to “come alongside” of him, so that he could instruct, encourage and help them to mature in their faith.** Barnabas could see the potential in people that others could not easily see. **He “came alongside them” and then “he called them alongside of him” so he could help them grow, mature and become fruitful for Christ.** We see him do this *twice* in the book of Acts. First, with Saul of Tarsus, who became the apostle Paul, ...and then with John Mark, his cousin, who later would write the second gospel. Not bad, right? But, remember, he earned this nickname *before* either of these guys came along! I wonder who else he had worked with!? **In order to get this nickname, the consistent, repeated pattern of his ministry had already become visibly apparent to the apostles.** They saw what he did, and referred to him by what they could determine his function was in the Body of Christ. He was “the Son of Calling-Alongside”.

In Acts 9, when everyone else was afraid to associate with Saul of Tarsus, who had once been a notorious persecutor of the church, it was Barnabas who “took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus” (vs. 27). This “coming alongside” of Saul alleviated the fears of the Christians, and Saul was able to move about freely with them, and he spoke out boldly in the name of the Lord in Jerusalem. When it was discovered that people were intending to kill Saul, he was sent to his home city, Tarsus of Cilicia, to escape harm. **In chapter 11, when Barnabas was sent to Antioch to investigate reports of a growing Gentile church there, he went off to Tarsus to seek out Saul and he summoned him to accompany him to Antioch, where for the next year they both taught considerable numbers of new disciples. By the end of that time, Saul had become well-known, recognized and established so that both he and Barnabas were chosen as representatives of the church** at Antioch to bring famine relief gifts to the poor in Jerusalem. When they returned, they were accompanied by Barnabas’ cousin, John Mark, a young man.

In Acts 13, the Holy Spirit said, “set apart to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work which I have called them to.” They left for Cyprus, taking along John Mark with them as an assistant. During this trip, Saul became the foremost figure in the team, reflected by the change of reference, ...from “Barnabas and Saul”, to “Paul and Barnabas”. John Mark, however, had bailed out on the mission, returning to Jerusalem after they left Cyprus. Paul and Barnabas had a successful mission, planting churches in the southern Galatian region of what is modern day Turkey. Upon their return, the church at Antioch sent them as representatives to the Jerusalem council, to discuss the question regarding whether Gentile converts needed to convert to Judaism, and keep the Law (Acts 15).

After that matter was decided, Paul and Barnabas spent some time in Antioch teaching and evangelizing, along with many others. Paul suggested that they return to look in on those who had responded to them on their previous mission. Barnabas purposed to “take along together with them” John Mark. Paul, however, did not want to “take along together with them” one who had deserted them before. The disagreement was so strong that they separated, ...Barnabas took along John Mark with him, and sailed to Cyprus, ...and Paul chose Silas and went by land to the churches they had planted in Turkey. The thing to note, however, is that Barnabas was doing what Barnabas was known for: *He was inviting John Mark to accompany him, because he saw the potential in him and was willing to invest in him.* Barnabas was willing to work with people that others were not willing to work with. *The strength of his ministry was relationship.* He invited Paul, and later John Mark, alongside of him, spending considerable time with them on a day-to-day basis. Through this relationship interaction, he was able to influence, train and encourage these men to grow in their maturity in Christ, discover and use their ministry gifts, and develop their own strengths in the Lord.

Do you suppose that John Mark needed the *same* lessons and treatment as Saul of Tarsus did? No, they were very different personalities, with different ministry callings and spiritual giftings. Barnabas was able to work with both of them, however, because he was inviting them into day-to-day relationship with him, and he could address those areas of need that became apparent and evident as they worked together in ministry. Barnabas’ gifting enabled him to come alongside them, when they were rejected or outcast, and then invite them to come alongside him in a mentoring relationship. The *paraklēsis*, the mentoring relationship they received was tailored to them, because this kind of training is life-related, ...it used the lessons of everyday life, and the example and strength of Barnabas’ mature walk with Christ, to encourage, instruct, strengthen, admonish and support these men, as needed.

Comfort, encouragement, exhortation and advocacy are all legitimate translation possibilities for what would come from the *paraklēsis* relationship. It depends on what is needed, ...and it depends on the personality of the person who is doing the ministry. We saw Barnabas seek Saul out, when everyone else avoided him. We saw him build a relationship of trust with Saul, by “going to bat for him” with the elders at the Jerusalem church. Because he had welcomed Saul, had shown interest and concern for him, and advocated on his behalf, Saul was willing to trust him and go with him to Antioch. Barnabas had “invited him to his side” and served him in whatever way he could. It is important that, whenever you see the word “exhortation” that you consider some of these other translational options. They may help you to relate to truth differently, if you see it presented to you in a different way. For example, some times we may need to be comforted, not confronted. Sometimes we may need someone to break the ice for us, and advocate on our behalf. Sometimes we may need to be encouraged and supported, not exhorted.

For example, in Paul’s writing to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:13, it is translated as, “give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.” In my mind, the word “exhortation” brings up forceful or emotionally rousing preaching, ...but if I substitute “encouragement”, the emotional tone of the passage takes on an entirely different hue. My response, ...the openness of my heart..., may be entirely different if I perceive this as a tender word of encouragement, instead of a forceful or harsh exhortation. And, if I am on the other side, ...as the preacher..., my expectation regarding what I am supposed to be doing in response to this verse is much broader. I may be led to speak with words of comfort and consolation, instead of exhortation. Many of us have been exposed to a religious culture that tends to express itself in customary patterns that may be more narrow than the broadness of the term, *paraklēsis*, might allow. As a result, we are not as sensitive to the people in our care as we could be, because we think that a customary rousing word of exhortation is what is required, when we should be open to other avenues of expression. We are like the fellow who only has a hammer, and is looking to pound on something.

Romans 12:3-8 says we have each been given a grace apportionment, ...a gifting from the Holy Spirit. We are to come to think of ourselves as we really are. We are not to think *beyond* what we are, and how we are to function, ...nor to think *amiss* about who we are and how we can operate according to our gifting. Someone with the gift of *paraklēsis* could be an exhorter, ...or a comforter, ...one who urges others to try new things, ...or one who challenges them to get up and get going! But the essence of this gift is the unusual Spirit-enabled ability to call others to yourself in a relationship of trust and respect to be able to support, instruct, encourage, build up or admonish as needed.