

FOUNDATION OF FAITH!
GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT
PART 14
THE GIFT OF EXHORTATION

This morning in our series Foundation of Faith, we are going to look at the gift of Exhortation, another gift that the Holy Spirit gives to the Church! We have looked at the ministering gifts which were, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor/teachers, teachers, discerners of spirits, the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge. But there is one more that goes in this section and that is the gift of exhortation and this gift is found in Romans chapter 12.

I want to read what Paul has to say here and then we will look at this gift of exhortation so we can see what it is all about. Paul tells us beginning in verse 3 of Romans chapter 12, **“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”** Romans 12:3-8.

The gift we will be looking at is the gift of exhortation and I do realize that many may not see this as a gift of the Spirit. But, according to what Paul tells us here in Romans chapter 12, it is a gift of the Spirit and it is part of the ministering gifts.

Now many people today can exhort others, and we should all be doing that, but please understand that this gift of exhortation is a supernatural gift given by the Holy Spirit that stimulates people into action. William MacDonald put it this way as he said that this “is the gift of stirring up the saints to desist from every form of evil and to press on to new achievements for Christ in holiness and service.” And when a person who has this gift comes alongside of you, they get you moving!

And think about this for a minute. We all need to be encouraged from time to time. Think about a young child who is beginning to walk. They may wobble back and forth but parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters are there cheering them on. They are encouraging or exhorting them to go forward and that is exactly what they do! On the other hand, if you were to make fun of them, mock them, discourage them, they many times would just give up, you are not encouraging them or exhorting them, but discouraging them.

Now, in saying all that, let me give you an example of how exhortation can spur someone into action. There was a young boy who worked long hours in a factory in Naples, Italy. And this young boy yearned to be a singer. When he was ten years old, he took his first lesson in voice. His teacher, not being an exhorter, said to him, “You can’t sing. You haven’t any voice at all. Your voice sounds like the wind in the shutters.” Can you imagine that? And yet, there are those that do that very thing today. “I feel the Lord wants me to teach Sunday School!” “You can’t do that! Think of the time it will take? Have you ever done that before?” You see, maybe you have been around people like that, and you do get discouraged when you talk with them. And here in this story we see that this teacher, he definitely was a discourager, and that is not a gift as some would have you think! Really, “I have the gift of discouragement!” I don’t think so!

Well, the boy’s mother saw something that the teacher did not see in her son, and she saw visions of greatness in her son, a diamond in the ruff you might say. She truly believed he had the talent to sing and even though she was very poor, she would do what she could to help her son achieve his dream. As dejected as he was at hearing those words from his teacher, she lovingly put her arms around him and encouraged him by saying, “My boy, I am going to make every sacrifice to pay for your voice lessons.”

Guess what? Her confidence in him and constant encouragement paid off. That young boy became one of the world’s greatest singers. Do you know who it was? It was Enrico Caruso!

What I want you to see here is the difference between exhortation and condemnation or discouragement? Exhortation stimulates you, it motivates you into action. Condemnation or discouragement causes you to withdraw and give up. Many today are good with condemnation and discouragement, it is easy, but it is not a gift from God. We also need to understand that condemnation is not speaking rebuke! There are times when someone needs to be corrected, rebuked with the intention of stimulating them and motivating them to move away from the evil and back towards God. The idea is restoration and not destruction!

Before we move on too much farther, let's look at the word that Paul used here in Romans 12:8 for "**exhorts.**" Paul used the Greek word PARAKALEO, (par-ak-al-eh'o), which is translated "**exhorts.**" This Greek word is made up of two different Greek words, PARA which means, "by the side," and KALEO which means, "to call."

Thus, this word "**exhorts**" means, "to call by the side." It can be translated, helper, to counsel, comforter or encourager. In fact, when Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit He called the Holy Spirit the PARAKLETOS, which has the same basic idea, to comfort.

In fact, that is how this word is translated when Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit, "**comforter**" or "**helper!**" And this gift of exhortation, many times works in conjunction with some of the other spiritual gifts, like pastor-teacher, teacher, mercy, ministry and-so-on.

Now exhortation does take work, there is an effort that must be put forth if you are going to exhort someone. And because of that many refuse to take those steps. Let me give you a worldly example to this spiritual principle that I want to share with you. People are obsessed with losing weight today. You go to the grocery store and every month you will find magazines with new ways to lose weight, all claiming that this is the answer, until the next month when another one comes out. On television you see this program and that program to help you lose weight and you are bombarded by women that are nothing more than flesh on bone, and that is how women are encouraged to look. There are many books out there promoting their new found way to lose weight fast and easy for both men and women!

There is a way that will work, even though it is very simplistic and it won't cost you any money. If the physical activity you engage in on a daily basis, if the things you do are more than what you take in, you will lose weight. And in the spiritual realm it is very similar. People are feeding on the Word of God, which is good, it is healthy, but sometimes that is all they are doing. They are gorging themselves on the Word of God and they are becoming spiritually overweight! The key is to get up and put into practice that which God is showing you. Put what you have taken in into action. If you do, you will become spiritually fit.

Remember what Paul said in Colossians 3:12-17, **“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”**

Notice what Paul is saying. What you are taking in from the Word of God, let it flow from your life and touch others, bringing glory to God, and in the end you will be blessed. You can't give out without getting back in return!

Let me share with you this one example from Pastor Romaine who went to be with the Lord several years ago. Pastor Romaine was Pastor Chuck's right hand man at Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa. This is just one way the gift works, but it is effective.

If you would have gone to see Pastor Romaine and you are complaining and whining about something, he would tell you, “Okay, get off your duff and get out of here and trust in the Lord. Don't come crying to me about your problems. Trust the Lord! Don't look to me for help, look to the Lord. I can't help you, but the Lord will.”

Now that may sound very cold, harsh, unloving but what Pastor Romaine was doing was exhorting people to put into practice the things they have learned from the Scriptures. Now some are not so blunt, but I will tell you this, it does move people to action and that is just how the Holy Spirit worked through pastor Romaine.

But we all need encouragement. Listen to this and you will see what I mean. We are told,

Edward Steichen, who eventually became one of the world's most renowned photographers, almost gave up on the day he shot his first pictures. At 16, young Steichen bought a camera and took 50 photos. Only one turned out - a portrait of his sister at the piano. Edward's father thought that was a poor showing. But his mother insisted that the photograph of his sister was so beautiful that it more than compensated for 49 failures. Her encouragement convinced the youngster to stick with his new hobby. He stayed with it for the rest of his life, but it had been a close call. What tipped the scales? The vision to spot excellence in the midst of a lot of failure.

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Again, we all need that from time to time. I remember in High School, and granted I was not a very good student back then. By the time I got to college that changed, but in High School, my parents were excited that I graduated. Anyway, my counselor, the one who is suppose to help you out, direct you where to go, encourage you in your future, basically told me that I should just go to a Junior College or Community College, I would never make it in a 4-year college! Okay, he had the ministry of discouragement and he was my counselor! That is just the opposite of what we are to do.

And yes, there are those people that are encouragers, and that is important, we should all do that. But there is also that supernatural gift of encouragement that just spurs people on. And we will see that in a minute.

Now to understand exhortation or comfort, we need to look to God, the creator of heaven and earth as our example. Too often today people have a warped concept of God. They see Him as this mean, vengeful, impatient God who is ready to strike anyone who gets out of line. Not a pretty picture, and not at all the picture that God gives us through the Scriptures. And if you think of God in that manner, it is very hard to get close to a God who is ready to strike you. Why would you want to get close, you would stay at arms distance from Him! Again, that is the wrong concept of God as we shall see.

I want to share with you two Scriptures in regards to this issue, for if you don't understand the character of God, the nature of God, your concept of Him is going to be very warped or distorted. The first Scripture I would like to look at is in the Old Testament book of Ezekiel where we read, **“Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?” says the Lord GOD, ‘and not that he should turn from his ways and live?’...‘Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways,’ says the Lord GOD. ‘Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,’ says the Lord GOD. ‘Therefore turn and live!’”** Ezekiel 18:23, 31-32.

Does this sound like a God who is ready to beat us up, destroy us? Not at all! Notice the compassionate heart of God even in the Old Testament! He is exhorting us to turn from our evil ways so that we might live. He is spurring us into action so we won't be destroyed. Why does He do that? It is very simple; it is because He loves us. You see, God gets no pleasure from our death but there is rejoicing in heaven when a person turns to God and is saved. In Luke 15:10 Jesus makes that point as He tells us, **“Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”**

In the New Testament we can go to II Corinthians chapter 1 and begin reading in verse 3 where Paul tells us, **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”** II Corinthians 1:3-4.

In this section of Scripture Paul uses the same Greek word that are used in Romans 12:8, PARAKALEO and PARAKLESIS when he was speaking, and we have translated them into our English words, **“comfort”** and **“comforted.”** And what Paul is saying is God has come and will come alongside us and help us, comfort us, and carry us through those difficult times we encounter in life. He will encourage us! God loves to wrap His arms around us and many times He does that through the body of Christ who are coming alongside to help.

I have experienced this in my own life. My wife and I were going through some difficult times years ago with one of our sons and it was something that was breaking our heart. And as I shared this with someone in the body, he gave me a big bear hug and shared with me some of the things that he and his wife went through as one of their children were growing up.

Did it take the problem away? No, it did not take the problem away, but it truly was an encouragement that I needed at that point. I love hugs, and I truly needed one that day. It was as if God Himself was wrapping His arms around me, and I guess He did through this person. His words stimulated me and motivated me to continue on. And that is exactly what Paul was saying in II Corinthians chapter 1. As God has comforted you through those difficult times, you then can go out and comfort others as God has comforted you. This man reached out and comforted me with the comfort that God had showed him. You see, exhortation!

Now, let's take some time and look at some Old Testament examples and some New Testament examples of this gift of exhortation being exercised. And keep in mind, when you look at the Old Testament prophets, and all through the New Testament, you see exhortation being exercised!

OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES OF EXHORTATION**1. JUDAH PLAYS THE HARLOT - JEREMIAH 3:1-5**

In Jeremiah 3:1-5 we see Jeremiah exhorting Judah to turn back to God and not to go after the false god's. They were involved in spiritual adultery and because of their actions judgment had and was coming upon them. He goes on to say in Jeremiah 4:1-2, **“If you will return, O Israel,’ says the LORD, ‘Return to Me; and if you will put away your abominations out of My sight, then you shall not be moved. And you shall swear, ‘The LORD lives,’ in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness; the nations shall bless themselves in Him, and in Him they shall glory.”**

The call is to stir them up into action and to desist from every form of evil. To press on to new achievements in holiness and service unto the true and living God instead of going after these other god's! Now the problem is that they then must act upon what they heard and they did not and they were brought into captivity because of it. Here's the thing, just because someone is exhorting us doesn't mean we have to listen, and many times that is the problem. We continue down that dangerous path until we find ourselves in captivity!

2. TRUST IN THE LORD - II CHRONICLES 20

In II Chronicles chapter 20 we find a great story of seeing what God can do in the most difficult, the most dangerous of situations! Here in II Chronicles chapter 20 we see three nations rise up against the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The Moabites, the Ammonites, and the Edomites, who were all blood relatives of Israel, and yet they were mounting an attack against Judah, and obviously Judah was outnumbered and outgunned!

On the throne in the Southern Kingdom of Judah was a godly king by the name of Jehoshaphat. And I love what Jehoshaphat does in this dangerous and really hopeless situation. He calls for a fast to seek the Lord in this matter. What a great thing to do and it was the right thing to do!

And as the people gathered around their king, he exhorted them by refocusing them on God, he refocused them on God's power, and he concludes by saying in verse 12 of II Chronicles chapter 20, "**O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You.**"

Again, a proper perspective of the situation - we have no strength, we can't do it on our own, and so our eyes are upon you Lord! It speaks of a total dependence upon God. It is as Psalm 46:1-2 says, "**God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, Even though the earth be removed, And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.**" It is when we lose the consciousness of God in our life that things get out of focus and we become anxious and terrified. Remember what David said in Psalm 31:24, "**Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart, All you who hope in the LORD.**"

And truly think about this for a minute. If you place your eyes upon people, guess what, you will be disappointed! If you place your eyes upon the situation you are facing, the circumstances you find yourself in, you, like Peter will begin to sink! Folk's, we need to place our eyes upon God and when we do we will be stable, He will see us through all that life has thrown our way! It is as Jehoshaphat said, "**. . . For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You.**" There is no other place to look but the Lord, and now they waited upon God to answer their hearts cry.

And so as they waited the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel, who said beginning in verse 15, **“And he said, ‘Listen, all you of Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem, and you, King Jehoshaphat! Thus says the LORD to you: ‘Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God’s. Tomorrow go down against them. They will surely come up by the Ascent of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the brook before the Wilderness of Jeruel. You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the LORD, who is with you, O Judah and Jerusalem!’ Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, for the LORD is with you.”** II Chronicles 20:15-17.

Did you see what Jahaziel did here? He exhorted them to look to God and see the salvation that He will bring in this battle. In fact the battle plan was to put the worship people in front as they went to battle and as they did, singing praises unto the Lord, the enemy was confused, and they began killing each other. Praise, especially during difficult times confuses the enemy. The people of Judah didn’t even lift a sword in this battle, the entire enemy had killed each other and it took 3 whole days for Judah to gather the spoils of this victory that God had given them. We can see that both Jehoshaphat and Jahaziel both exhorted the people to look to God, to trust in the Lord.

Now let’s look at some New Testament examples of this gift in operation and see how it is played out!

NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLES OF EXHORTATION

1. YOU CAN'T STOP A GOOD MAN - ACTS 14

We are going to see here that you can't stop a good man who is serving the Lord, whose faith is in the Lord, whose strength is in the Lord! Here in Acts chapter 14 we see that Paul was in Lystra with Barnabas, and Paul heals a man who never walked in his life, crippled his entire life, up to this point anyway. Now when the people saw this they thought, "**The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!**" In fact they thought Paul, being the smaller guy, was the god Mercury, and Barnabas, being bigger, was the god Jupiter. And as these pagan priests hear of this they come with sacrifices to offer to Paul and Barnabas. When they saw this we see that Paul and Barnabas tore their clothes and pointed them to the true and living God, explaining that they too are only men and not gods!

Now when the Jews from Antioch and Iconium got word of what was going on, they came and stoned Paul to death, at least they thought he was dead, and they dragged his body out of the city, and left him for dead. And we read beginning in verse 20 of Acts chapter 14, "**However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.'**" Acts 14:20-22.

You see, you just can't stop a servant of God. Paul was almost killed; he then gets up, goes and preaches in Derbe, and then goes back to the place where they tried to kill him! What in the world was he doing there? Not filing a complaint with the local law enforcement on how he was mistreated, beaten up. He was not protesting against those that tried to kill him. But he exhorted the believers to continue on in the faith. They saw the example of Paul and it encouraged them to continue walking in the faith.

Paul saw his life as nothing. His focus was pointing people to Jesus. Paul was a servant, a humble man. You see, a proud person would never do this because he is too consumed with himself. He is more interested in meeting his own needs, getting what he can out of life, rather than giving of himself, he wants to be popular. Paul, on the other hand, was others-centered! Because of that he was able to exhort the people.

Can you imagine witnessing all that happened to Paul and now he is the one exhorting them to go on? That had to fire them up, encourage them and that is exactly what this gift does!

2. BUILDING UP THE GENTILES IN THE FAITH - ACTS 15

In Acts chapter 15 we will see the gentiles built up in the faith. Here in Acts chapter 15 we see a dispute arise over the gentiles that were coming to Christ. Some of the Jews believed that these gentiles should become a Jew, get circumcised, and keep the Law of Moses. And so before things got out of hand they had the Jerusalem council church meeting to help settle this situation.

And after hearing all the arguments, James comes to a conclusion that the gentiles did not need to do these things, even the Jew's couldn't keep the Law of Moses! And so he sends a letter to the church back in Antioch, to the gentile believers. And we read beginning in verse 31 of Acts chapter 15, "**When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement. Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words.**" Acts 15:31-32. Not only did this letter encourage the gentile church to continue on, but Judas and Silas did the same.

And think about what they wanted the gentiles to do, keep the Law and, as I have said, the Jews could not even keep it. You see, the Law is a heavy burden but when the church in Antioch read this letter it brought them great comfort and joy! It is as Paul said in II Thessalonians 2:16-17, "**Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.**"

Do you see that even a letter, a card, even just a little note can be a source of encouragement to people. May we not forget that!

3. EXHORTING THE EPHESIAN ELDERS - ACTS 20

Next, we are going to look at Paul exhort, encourage the Ephesian elders. Remember the story in Acts chapter 20 as Paul is on his way to Jerusalem, and the ship docks in Miletus, which is about 30 miles or so from Ephesus. So Paul calls for the Ephesian elders to come so he may exhort them one last time, his farewell address to those he spent 3 years teaching.

And we read beginning in verse 27 of Acts chapter 20, **“For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.”** Acts 20:27-36.

And we see in these verses Paul exhort these leaders to shepherd the flock that God has entrusted to them by feeding them, warning them, and protecting them. He exhorted them to live a life that is pleasing to God, to be an example to the people, to maintain a good reputation. Paul, seeing these men for the last time, poured out all that was on his heart, building them up in the faith, and exhorting them to continue on, and they responded in a way that shows how much they loved Paul. We read beginning in verse 37 of Acts chapter 20, **“Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship.”** Acts 20:37-38.

Do you see how much they loved Paul and respected this man of God! And I am sure those words encouraged them greatly in the work that God had called them to do. To stay focused, to not let anything move them off the course that God has set for their life. What a powerful gift this is, this gift of exhortation!

We are going to spend a few minutes looking at a man named Barnabas. I like to call this guy Mr. Encouragement because that is exactly what he did. He was an amazing man of God who exhorted people to forge ahead in the work of God, to get started in the work of God, to continue on in the work of God. So let’s look at this man and see what was manifested in his life.

4. BARNABAS - MR. ENCOURAGEMENT!

A. HE LIVED WHAT HE BELIEVED - ACTS 4

The first thing I want to focus on regarding this man named Barnabas is that he lived what he believed and that is important if we are going to encourage people, they need to see our faith lived out in our lives.

In Acts chapter 4 we see the church continue to grow in Jerusalem. And that was like a death sentence for most of the Jewish believers. They were excommunicated from the synagogues. They were fired from their jobs. Their friends left them and their families disowned them, they thought of them as being dead, some would even have a funeral!

And so they were hurting and hungry, while some of the other believers were doing better, and they sold some of their land and gave the money to the church to help those believers out who were in need. And we can read of this in Acts chapter 4, beginning in verse 32, where we are told, **“Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.”** Acts 4:32-37.

Here we see that this man named Joses, who was also called Barnabas, also helped out with ministering to those in need. And I'm sure he got the name Barnabas out of the way he lived. Why do I say that? Because his name, “Barnabas” means “son of encouragement!” Barnabas did not just talk about helping others, he lived it. His deeds matched up with his words. Remember what John said in I John 3:18, **“My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”** I John 3:18. Barnabas was concerned about the needs of others, he lived what he believed!

B. TAKING A CHANCE ON OTHERS - ACTS 9

The next thing we see is that this man Barnabas, Mr. Encouragement was willing to take a chance on others. He was willing to let them take a step in faith and see what the Lord would do in their lives. Could they fail? They could but Barnabas was a man who was always encouraging them to go forward!

We are going to see this transpire with Paul the apostle, who if you remember was a persecutor of the church before he got saved. In Acts chapter 9 we see Saul's or Paul's conversion experience. And again, he went from persecuting Christians to defending the faith. And we read beginning in verse 20 of Acts chapter 9, "**Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. Then all who heard were amazed, and said, 'Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?' But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ. Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket. And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.**" Acts 9:20-26.

Here is the dilemma. His old friends, the religious leaders saw him as the enemy to their faith, they wanted him dead. The believers in Christ were still afraid of him. They weren't sure if Saul was legitimate or not in the faith. And really, could you blame them? Absolutely not, they saw what he was doing to Christians, even consenting to the death of Stephen! So what could he do? Not a whole lot! But in Acts 9:27-28 we read, "**But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out.**"

Notice what this man does here. We see Barnabas take a chance and he brought Saul to the apostles and stood up for him. True ministry is not activity, but it is people. And here we see Barnabas stand up for Saul, which must have encouraged him, and the other believers. You see, Mr. Encouragement!

C. A HUMBLE SPIRIT - ACTS 11

Another aspect to this man's life is that he had a humble spirit and truly, if you are going to encourage others you can't be haughty or looking down upon people, you must be humble. In Acts chapter 11 we see the church moving out of Jerusalem, being scattered because of the persecution that was mounting in Jerusalem. And in Antioch a large number of Greeks got saved. And we read beginning in verse 22 of Acts chapter 11 **“Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.”** Acts 11:22-24.

Here we see that Barnabas goes to Antioch and God is working in him and through him, things are happening. And as this is going on we read beginning in verse 25 of Acts chapter 11, **“Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.”** Acts 11:25-26.

Wait a minute here. I thought this was Barnabas's ministry, why did Barnabas do that? Why did he let Paul take over? Because he saw his limitations and also saw that Saul or Paul, raised in the Greek culture, schooled in the Law of God, was better equipped for the job, so he goes to Tarsus to find Saul and bring him back.

You see, Barnabas was concerned with others and wasn't interested in a position or recognition like so many people are today. He had a very humble spirit and was more interested in the work of God than human recognition or accolades! He was willing to step down and let Saul come in because he was the best man for the job here in Antioch. In fact, we read in Acts 15:35, "**Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.**" Notice, Paul is mentioned first, even though Barnabas was the older Christian and the one who was sent to Antioch. Barnabas stepped back and he let Paul shine! He was a man with a humble spirit this Mr. Encouragement!

D. THE PRICE YOU PAY - ACTS 15

Now please understand that there is a price you will pay for being an exhorter, an encourager and we will see that with Barnabas. You see, Barnabas was a man who did not like to give up on anyone. He saw the diamond in the ruff you might say. And when you go out on a limb for someone you do take a chance, you can pay a heavy price.

In Acts chapter 15, beginning in verse 36 we read, **“Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.’ Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.”** Acts 15:36-41.

Here we see that Paul was ready to do the circuit, to go back to areas where they had preached before, to encourage them and see how they were doing. And Barnabas wanted to take John Mark, but Paul didn't. Why was Paul so harsh on John Mark? Because Paul saw how he did not finish the work last time, that he left before the work was done. And thus, he was not going to take him again. Barnabas, on the other hand, saw the potential of this young man and was not ready to give up on him. And because of that, because of all the contention, Paul and Barnabas split up and went their own way. Paul ends up taking Silas with him and Barnabas ends up taking John Mark.

What happened to John Mark? What happened to this man who did not finish the work? He ended up being one Paul's most valuable co-workers in the faith. How can that be? It was because of one man who saw his potential and was willing to take that chance and work with him. Notice how Paul spoke of John Mark in Colossians 4:10,

“Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him).” And again in II Timothy 4:11 we read, **“Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.”**

And here we see that this man who struggled to complete the work early on in his life now has a Gospel that bears his name: The Gospel According to Mark! And some believe that it was Peter who gave Mark all the information he used in writing this Gospel. Again, all because one man stood up for him and exhorted him to go on, and he did!

Let me show you how this is played out in life and it is not very complicated, it may take some of your time, you do have to make the effort to exhort a person, to encourage them to go on, to go farther, to forge ahead. In this story we are told,

A little nine-year-old boy got tired of practicing the piano. His mother heard the great Paderewski was coming into town to do a concert. She bought two tickets, one for herself and one for her boy. And she dragged him along, sat him down by her in his little tuxedo, and she began visiting with her friends. He looked up on the platform and there was this giant, ebony black, Steinway concert grand piano. The lid on the keyboard was lifted and the leather bench was there. He looked at this piano, popped his knuckles, and said to himself, “Oh, man, I'd like to play that.”

So he slipped down the aisle, walked across the front, up the steps, sat down, and started playing “Chopsticks.”

Well, the people down front said, “Who . . . who is . . . ?” “Quit!” “Hey, kid, stop!” “Where’s his mother?” Of course she was embarrassed beyond words.

The great Paderewski, who was back fixing his tie, heard what was going on. So without the boy seeing him, he slipped out on the stage and came in behind the little boy, reached around him and improvised a beautiful melody to go with “Chopsticks.” Then he said to the boy, “Keep playing. Don’t quit. Don’t stop.”

- D. H. DeHaan, Windows on the Word

You see, exhortation and the gift of exhortation is truly needed in the church today. We all need to be encouraged and exhorted to move forward. My pastor did that with me, as well as others in the church I came from. From teaching a Bible study to overseeing ministries, they were the result of someone exhorting me on. Exhortation stimulates and motivates people into action!

Most of us probably remember that old phone commercial that said, “Reach out and touch someone!” Okay, maybe I am just dating myself, but there was a commercial like that back in 1979! The point is this. God is calling all of us to do just that, to reach out and touch someone, to exhort people. Remember what Paul said in Hebrews 10:24-25, “**And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.**”

Paul is admonishing us to gather together as a local body of believers to worship God, to stir each other up for good works and-so-on. So if you are not doing that, then you are negating what the Scriptures are saying here! You see, how can you stir people up, exhort them, encourage them if you don't reach out and touch them you might say? You can't! You have to make that effort and as God gives to you this supernatural gift of exhortation, don't hold it back, use it for the glory of God. You see, you don't know how you can impact a person's life and you may find that diamond that may be hiding in the ruff! The gift of exhortation, may we use it often in our lives!