

1 Peter 4:10

1Pe 4:10 (NKJV) As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

As we begin this evening, I want to mention that I have developed a very interesting study on what are often called the “sign gifts” or the “miracle gifts”. Obviously, neither of those terms appear in the New Testament and there are a lot of inappropriate teachings on them. I think that I will wait until I finish the seven gifts that we are concentrating on and bring this study in about a month from now.

Now, we are continuing to look at the seven “personal” spiritual gifts identified in [Romans 12:6-8](#),

Ro 12:6 (NKJV) 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; ⁷ or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; ⁸ he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

As we continue to examine each of these spiritual gifts, it is important to appreciate that the exercise of each of our spiritual gifts is very necessary for the health of the body of Christ. It is important to appreciate that even though a believer may have multiple spiritual gifts, that does not guarantee that they are actually using those gifts. If we do not exercise our gifts, then in reality it has no value to the body of Christ. The more that believers use their spiritual gifts, the stronger the local body of Christ becomes.

As we have said from study to study, our spiritual gifts are not natural endowments, not natural skills and aptitudes that we may have, but to the contrary they are divine enablements, divine and supernatural spiritual abilities that God has given to each believer to use for the benefit of other people. If God has given you natural abilities, He certainly may and will use those abilities, but spiritual gifts are just that – spiritual in nature. They are gifts that make a “spiritual” impact on people’s lives. We also need to appreciate that no one gift is more important than any other gift. They all have equal importance within the body of Christ. I seems that many people have elevated the speaking gifts, but that is not biblical and should be corrected. One of the very critical aspects of any teaching on spiritual gifts is that just because we all have various spiritual gifts does not necessarily make us spiritual and it does not make us right in a particular area.¹ The wisdom of God is invested in many people, and even though we may have strong inclinations and predispositions in certain areas related to our spiritual gifts, those propensities still need to be in alignment with the input and wisdom of other believers. One of the worst things that a believer can do is to lord his gifting over other believers. Actually, that is a sign of grievous spiritual immaturity and not evidence of true spirituality.

So far we have addressed the gift of prophecy, ministry, and teaching, and tonight we will look at the gift of “**exhortation**”, which is the Greek word “*parakaleo*”. This is a particular gifting that each of us should be exercising in our life. Paul was speaking in [Thessalonians 5](#) to people who were concerned about the times and the seasons, what we might call the end times, and in v11 he said this to them,

1Th 5:11 (NKJV) Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

That is this gift – comforting and encouraging each other in the truth and in the realities of God’s Word.

¹ MacArthur, ep.

From a technical definition the verb form of the word means to call upon someone to do something, to encourage them, to admonish them.² It is also used in the sense of strongly beseeching, imploring, and pleading with someone to do something, especially when you may know that what they are doing may be harmful to themselves or their family.³ We live in a culture in which truth is perceived as no longer being absolute, as being relative, flexible, and ever-changing. Men have made their god in their own image, made him to be whatever they want him to be, but that is not the God of Scripture. He is immutable and never changes and His truth never changes. The reality is that God's Word and God's truth never changes. Truth is absolute, truth is never changing.

However, if men do not like God's truth, then they simply re-forge a god of their choosing to be whatever they want him to be. That happened at the foot of Mt. Sinai when those who were led out of Egypt wanted another god and so they made a golden calf and worshipped a cow. Once a nation, Israel constantly made themselves gods that suited their morals and lifestyles. The things that men are willing to worship today are like meaningless cows, and anything that they worship other than the true God of Scripture will lead them to a place of ultimate and eternal regret. Just me saying something like that will anger people. In a time and place where biblical values and morals are being ejected from the culture at an alarming rate, people need encouragement that is more than just casual, but encouragement that is biblical and faithful to the Word of God. Without the truth, men have no hope. The truth is what sets them free and provides the life that only God can provide. The point in all of this is that we live in a time where so many people desperately need encouragement to not forsake or fall away from the truths about God that really matter. If you are a believer, then please appreciate that God has invested His life and His truth into you, and my encouragement to you in this message is that even if you do not have the actual gifting of encouragement, it does not prevent you from being an encourager. As long as you have the truth embedded in your heart and mind, you can be an encouragement in multiple ways to everyone you meet.

We cannot forget that each of these gifts that are listed in [Romans 12](#) are “supernatural” abilities that an individual is given by the Holy Spirit. The gift of exhortation allows a believer to be successful when encouraging, comforting, and even admonishing people in their lives. I am sure that you do as well, but I simply love being with people that I know who have this particular gifting of encouragement in their life. It is like I cannot get enough of them in my life. Everyone needs encouragement – everyone. It does not matter who we are or where we are in our life spiritually, there is always room for godly and biblical encouragement.

In the Book of Acts, this word for encouragement and exhortation was used frequently to speak about how Paul actually ministered to people, and normally, it was used to speak about how he spoke to them as he was teaching them the truths of God. For instance, [Acts 16:40](#) says,

Ac 16:40 (NKJV) So they went out of the prison and entered *the house of Lydia*; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

[Acts 20:2](#) says,

² Zodhiates, 1105.

³ Vine, #3870, ep.

Ac 20:2 (NKJV) **Now when he had gone over that region and encouraged them with many words, he came to Greece**

In [Acts 2:40](#) on the Day of Pentecost, Peter used the word to urge and exhort the Jews to turn to Christ.

Ac 2:40 (NKJV) **And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation."**

Often times Paul would use this word by providing a kind of moral directive for someone's life. For instance, [Romans 12:1](#) says,

Ro 12:1 (NKJV) **I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your reasonable service.***

You can see from this verse that this was a very, very strong appeal. It is the same Greek word "*parakaleo*" and carries here the sense of urging, of pleading, of pressing, of imploring. This was only the second place in [Romans](#) up to this point where an exhortation had been provided, so this encouragement comes after 11 chapters of the most prolific teaching on doctrine found anywhere in the Scriptures.

It was obvious how much Paul loved the church at Thessalonica and he seemed to always find ways to encourage them in his letters. For instance, [1 Thessalonians 2:10-12](#) and

1Th 2:10 (NKJV) **You *are* witnesses, and God *also*, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; ¹¹ as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father *does* his own children, ¹² that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.**

[1 Thessalonians 4:1](#) says,

1Th 4:1 (NKJV) **Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God;**

These are great words of encouragement. In [1 Corinthians 1:10](#), Paul uses the same Greek word to urge unity among the believers, but in the NKJV it is translated as "**plead**". It will probably be different in your translation – such as "**exhort, appeal, urge, entreat**".

1Co 1:10 (NKJV) **Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.**

However, when looking at this word as it applies to us as New Testament believers, it is important to notice that the noun form of the Greek word is "*paraklesis*". From this word we get one of the titles of the Holy Spirit, or the "*Paraclete*" from [John 14:16](#) which says,

Jn 14:16 (NKJV) **And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper (*paraklesis*). **that He may abide with you forever...****

In that usage of the word, it means one who comes alongside of you to help you. In the way that the word is used regarding the New Testament believer is that someone with this gifting has that special ability to come alongside of another believer and to help them, to comfort them, to build them up, to

strengthen them with the Word of God. The word is used of Christ in [1 John 2:1](#) speaking of His willingness to help us when we may be struggling with some particular sin in our life.

1Jn 2:1 (NKJV) My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate (*parakletos*) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

The word “**Advocate**” is “*parakletos*” and means an intercessor, one who consoles and comforts. That is exactly what Jesus Christ does for us when our life may be struggling and wavering.

So, the gift of encouragement or exhortation is speaking of those people in the body who come alongside of other members to provide them with comfort, encouragement, counsel, love, and exhortation. Normally, the kind of encouragement that the exhorter provides is specific, biblical truths that are accompanied by practical applications. They may provide casual encouragement such as simply to keep yourself safe as the pandemic gets closer to us. Ultimately, though, their desire is to actually motivate people to apply God’s Word into their life rather than just hearing about it. I have found personally that this is very difficult simply because we are all creatures of habits – some good, some bad, some fairly neutral. The problem is that most people are NOT inclined to change. They can hear the Word of God week after week, but never implement anything that they have been taught. They may say to the pastor something like “Good sermon Pastor” or “I really enjoyed that message today”, but never with any intent of changing or applying anything they learned for their life. This is one of the banes of the modern church – familiarity with the truth that effects no personal change. I hope that everyone clearly understands that if your life is not changing, not growing, and not progressing spiritually, then in all likelihood you may be the very person that the encourager will speak to – religious and satisfied. The encourager will not let you rest in that place. His gifting almost demands that he or she speak to your life. They see its direction and simply feel compelled to be an encourager to you.

One very important aspect of an encourager, and I personally believe this is what helps them to be successful, is that they actually understand what may be troubling you or hindering your Christian life. They seem to have a keen sense of understanding, not just about you, but about the Christian life, about what works and what does not work. There is no real value to just encourage someone without having meaningful substance in the actual encouragement. The encourager generally sees more in you than you may see in yourself, and that is why he desires to build you up and encourage you. He understands what God wants to do in you and through you. As a pastor, one of my greatest frustrations is to teach on a topic over an extended period of time for the express purpose of driving home specific truth or truths about a passage, but then never see anyone implement anything. Unfortunately, many people simply are not prone to work on different areas of our life – even their health. We are reluctant to change both what and how we eat. We are satisfied with never getting any quality exercise. Maybe we are just lazy, or maybe we are difficult to get along with – always contending about anything, maybe we are very impatient with people and we know it, maybe we talk harshly to our children, maybe we drive too fast, maybe we ignore our marriage partner. Who knows what all of the problems may be. When the person with the gift of encouragement sees these things in a person’s life, they are spiritually driven to help them see their flaws and find meaningful ways to change. The true encourager will always offer very practical biblical guidance for achieving God’s purposes for your life.

I remember one time when I was with my doctor in Columbia, and we were talking about a specific new treatment that I was going to begin along with my monthly infusions, and she made the following statement to me. She said, “Most of the time people have been feeling bad for so long that they no longer remember what it used to be like when they felt really good”. In a sense, that is what I am saying. We get stuck in our spiritual rut, have a propensity to never have the will to change what God wants us to change in our life, and for the most part never actually experience what God has for our life. We just wallow in our spiritual mediocrity and seem satisfied. Anyone who has no meaningful desire to change and to grow spiritually probably has no understanding of what the Christian life is actually about. The Christian life is **always** about change, always about growing, always about adjusting, and that is exactly why we need to surround our life with people who will encourage us and exhort us and challenge us and help us map out a course where we can be spiritually successful. If you know someone who is completely satisfied with where they are spiritually, then you are probably the one who can be an encourager in their life.

The person with this gifting understands how trials and struggles always have the potential to produce new levels of spiritual maturity in a person’s life, so they love the fact that we may be struggling in our life. That actually encourages them because they can see God preparing us for something that He wants to build into our life. They are the person who is going to quote [James 1:2-4](#) to us,

Jas 1:2 (NKJV) My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

They are going to remind us of [Hebrews 10:35-36](#) which says,

Heb 10:35 (NKJV) Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. ³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:

The person with this gifting does a lot of things. They advise, they plead, they warn or admonish, they build us up, they comfort us when we are hurting, and they strengthen us when we are weak. They will not let you reel in self-pity. They literally hate that. They hate excuses. For me as a pastor, there are times when I am going to admonish and correct the church as a whole, and times when I will build you up in your faith. It all works in concert with one another. It is amazing how many people become depressed, discouraged, frustrated over things in their life that they really should be having consistent victory over. However, the encourager sees all of that as a great opportunity to exercise their gifting. They will not let you walk alone. They will always be there to help you, to encourage you, and to exhort your life towards the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus. They do not mind helping carry part of your burden for you just so that you will know that you are not alone. I knew a man once who was going through an ugly divorce in his life. Much of it was self-inflicted, but I met with him every morning for over six months at the Savannah River Site main front parking lot for 30 minutes and prayed with him. I did that because he needed someone to help him get through that time of his life without just completely falling apart.

We just never know who is hurting and struggling in their life. When it may be us, we try to hide it, to conceal it, and to not let anyone else know how we may be feeling or what we may be struggling with in our life. I love the way that [Hebrews 3:12-13](#) uses this word when it says,

Heb 3:12 (NKJV) Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; ¹³ but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

Normally when people become discouraged, there is a tendency to revert back to old habits, to regress back into how they use to be. Obviously, in v13, the encouragement is to all believers to exhort other believers who they notice may be drifting away from Christ. This is very difficult simply because when we see someone who actually appears to be departing from Christ in some way, our tendency is that we often become reluctant in speaking to them. We do not want to appear to be prying or meddling or snooping into their life, so we just watch from a distance, and before we know it, that person is gone. I think that one of the encouragements to all of us when we have someone like that in our life is that we need to appreciate that sincere concern is never out of taste. Caring for someone's spiritual life and for their spiritual well-being is a good thing and is what God will often use to help get them back on track. I love in [1 Thessalonians 2:7](#) how Paul described what he was like when he came to the Thessalonians. He said the following,

1Th 2:7 (NKJV) But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing *mother* cherishes her own children.

Reproof and correction may be strong, but generally when someone is an encourager, they are rarely harsh, but gentle in how they are helping someone. You cannot be an encourager to someone if you do not care about them personally. When you see someone who is always snapping at people, speaking gruffly to them, impatient and short tempered with them, you can be assured that they do not have this gifting and need someone to help them. What a great gift that God has given the church to have people in it with the gift of exhortation. As I have said all along, all of us need to find ways to exercise all of these gifts. I am convinced that most mature believers have more spiritual gifts than they may actually realize, and Scripture beseeches us all to exercise each one of them. So, my encouragement to you this evening is to try and encourage everyone that you meet in some way. They will appreciate both you and your encouragement.

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