

10/22/2019... Prayer Meeting... JP

God's call to salvation is in actuality a two-fold call... First, it is a call into an intimate, personal relationship with Him; and second, it is a call to service, ministry, or a mission. **Mark 3:14**, "He appointed twelve that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach."

The Early Church had an ongoing personal relationship with Christ (Acts 4:13-20)

The early church turned the world upside down because they had experienced a life-changing encounter with Christ. Even the Jewish religious leaders of the day could find no other explanation for their boldness. It was not found in credentials...background...standing in society...training...education, etc.; but it was concluded they had a spirit-filled boldness that was born out of knowing Jesus!

No fact is more important for our consideration today. All around us we see signs of the diminishing impact of Christianity on our culture. We talk about the advancement of secularism as we observe the crumbling of social institutions that have withstood the test of times...the destruction of the family...and the erosion of moral values. We wonder why the Christian faith has lost its influence in our society. I think this passage offers us a very clear answer.

The early church turned the world upside down because they had a life-changing encounter with Christ. It was more than head knowledge or the offering up of self-centered prayers. It was their intimate relationship with Christ that produced a dynamic power that transformed ordinary people into bold witnesses for Christ! How would you evaluate your present relationship with Christ Jesus?

The Early Church recognized that they were empowered to be on mission with Christ (Acts 4:32-37)

And out they went on mission, representing the Lord to all whom they encountered. Joseph was a man who was named for his spiritual gift. He was from the island of Cyprus. He was a Levite. He was an early convert to the Christian faith and a close friend of the Apostle Paul. Joseph was his given name, but his nickname was Barnabas, Son of Encouragement. He was named for his spiritual gift because it perfectly reflected his character. Every born-again believer has at least one grace gift. **(Ro 12; 1 Cor 12; Eph 4) 1 Peter 4:10** says, "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

Barnabas...Encourager, the Greek word is very interesting. It is *parakaleo*... *Para* is a preposition meaning "alongside of" and *kaleo* is a verb meaning "to call." So, *parakaleo* means "to call alongside of." It carries the idea of coming to the aid or assistance of someone else. The implication is an ability to help someone in an area where someone cannot help themselves.

The person who does this is called a *paraclete*. That's the Greek word used in **John 14:6** for the Holy Spirit, and in **1 John 2:1** for Christ Jesus. In the first instance, the word means that the Holy Spirit comes alongside to give us strength to live the Christian life. In the latter case, it means that the Lord Jesus is our Advocate who speaks up in our defense.

This spiritual gift could be referred to as exhortation or comfort or consolation or advocacy or encouragement. **1 Thess 5:11** and **Hebrews 3:13** reveals that this work of lifting others up is something all of us are to do for one another as we see the need and have the opportunity and ability to do so.

However, as a spiritual gift it means that there are some of us who will be given the grace gift or spiritual ability in this area. It's the special ability the Lord God empowers upon certain members of the body of Christ which enables them to come alongside another person to give encouragement, to challenge, to counsel, or to give advice as needed in such a way that the person is "helped."

People with the gift of encouragement have a tendency to genuinely like people. They possess good relational skills. They root for the underdog. They are open-minded, forgiving, and tolerant. They are quick to respond to personal needs and quick to give the benefit of the doubt. They are usually well-liked by others and have the ability to spot spiritual potential. And...and they love to talk!

Encouragers are the on-hands, practical types who do not like a lot of theory; and they get bored with doctrinal discussions that, in their mind, have nothing to do with real life!

Consider the example of Barnabas (Acts 9:22-28; Acts 15: 36-41)

Barnabas was not afraid to stand alongside God's messengers during difficult times. He was the first person of influence to extend a hand to Saul of Tarsus following his conversion from a bounty hunter seeking to stop the advancement of Christianity, to an apostle for Christ to the Gentiles. Barnabas stepped-up and stepped-in when the Jews stood ready to stone Paul.

You see, the Early Church looked at Saul and saw a problem... Barnabas looked at Paul and saw his potential. The Early Church looked at Saul and saw his past... Barnabas looked at Paul and saw his future. The Early Church saw what he had been... Barnabas saw what he could be.

That is just what encouragers do. They see potential...they look to the future. They focus on what people might become given time and the power of the Holy Spirit!

Later on, as Paul had become accepted and more prominent among the people and the other apostles; Barnabas quietly stepped back behind the scene as Paul took center stage.

Now, mind you, Paul and Barnabas had their moments of disagreement. On one occasion a serious conflict arose over John Mark, Barnabas' cousin. Young Mark had left the team to return home during their first missionary journey to the Gentiles. Paul was unwilling to allow Mark to join them on their second missionary journey. Mark was out...but so was Barnabas!

So, we read of Barnabas offering a hand to Mark. Paul set out one way, and Mark and Barnabas went another way. Later, of course, we know that they reconciled and still supported one another.

The Gift of Encouragement active in the Church body today

Thank the Lord for men and women who encourage the rest of us! What a sad and dreary world it would be without them. They bring light into our world and lift us up when we fall down. Many of us might have quit a long time ago if it had not been for the Lord calling an encourager to come alongside of us.

Examples of Granny Perry...Mom...Vivian. And this gift can be realized within the church through laypersons as well as staff personnel. Examples a FBCD.

You may never know the difference you have made in a life, but believe me you have and you will!

Who knows? Without Barnabas we might not have half of the New Testament!