



The Gift of Exhortation

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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PM Assembly



Introduction:

The baseball scout called up the team manager with an eager report. “Boss, I’ve found the guy you need to sign. He’s a pitcher like I’ve never seen before. He struck out 20 batters in a row. Only one guy even hit the ball, and all three hits were fouls. I’m telling you, we need to look into this guy before someone else snatches him up.” The manager replied, “Don’t talk to the pitcher. Talk to the guy who fouled those balls. We don’t need any more pitching on our team. What we need right now are guys who can hit the ball.”

That manager had a healthy perspective of teamwork. He understood that every person at every position provides different strengths and gifts. A great batter doesn’t have to be a great pitcher and vice versa. While it is nice when a pitcher can also hit well, most of the time that doesn’t matter too much. Few pitchers lie awake at night worried about their RBIs or base hit record. Just so, in the church, we don’t need to lie awake at night fretting over what we don’t know how to do or what we aren’t any good at. What we need to focus on is the ability and natural bent that God has given us by His grace. As we’ve already learned from **Romans 12:3-8**, we all have differing abilities which allow us all to function in different ways. We don’t need to be jealous of others and their abilities, neither do we need to devalue our own abilities. Instead, we need to see our place in the congregation, step up, and fill it.

So what is your place? Perhaps you have already learned that you are a Server. Or maybe you have discovered that you are a Teacher. Maybe you’re still waiting to figure out your gift. If so, you might be an Exhorter. Today’s lesson will examine the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for those with the gift of exhortation.

Discussion:

I. Am I an Exhorter?

- A. As we have seen with the other gifts, we all have responsibility in exhortation. **II Corinthians 13:11** says we must “comfort one another.” The word translated “comfort” is the same word found in **Romans 12:8** when it talks about “the one who exhorts.” While we all need to work on this ability in our lives, there are some among us who naturally excel in this area. This is their strength. With this ability comes responsibility. If you have this gift, you need to be functioning in it within this body of believers. That is why God put you here.
- B. You may be wondering, “Is that my place? Am I an Exhorter?” Allow me to share five characteristic strengths of the gift of exhortation. We will be looking at the life of Barnabas to help with this. After all, anyone who is called “the son of exhortation” ought to be able to demonstrate some key strengths in this gift.
 1. *Exhorters want to help people (Acts 4:36-37)*: Barnabas was concerned about people. So, when folks were in need, Barnabas was among the first to provide for that need (demonstrating that he also had strength as a Giver). His exhortation and encouragement grew out of that concern for others. We will note that there are a lot of similarities between Teachers and Exhorters. They will work in many of the same roles. The difference is that Teachers are more focused on passing on the knowledge, facts, and information correctly, while Exhorters are more focused helping, strengthening, and empowering the people who hear them.
 2. *Exhorters want to empower others in their lives and ministries (Acts 9:27; 11:25-26)*: We often look back at Saul, who became the apostle Paul, as one of the greatest Christians in the New Testament. However, if it hadn’t been for Barnabas, there would have been no Paul. God placed Barnabas in Paul’s life for the very purpose of empowering Saul to move from a feared persecutor to a respected brother and Teacher. Exhorters want to see people living victoriously. They want to see others succeed. They aren’t as concerned about the competition as they are the teamwork. So they exhort, comfort, encourage, counsel, advise. They want to see others growing and excelling in confidence.
 3. *Exhorters often accept others as they are without condemning them (Acts 15:36-39)*: John Mark had abandoned Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. Paul gifted as a Teacher and with Insight (prophet) was quick to condemn. John Mark had messed up and that was that. Barnabas, on the other hand, gifted as an Exhorter did not see this in such black and white terms. Sure, John Mark had messed up, but that didn’t make him a bad person. Like everyone else, he was growing. Those with the gift of Teaching think in terms of “yes” and “no,” “in” and “out,” “right” and “wrong.” Exhorters tend to see the spectrum and aren’t as quick to condemn others but rather try to come alongside them and empower them to grow and succeed.

4. *Exhorters focus more on application than mere knowledge (Acts 11:23-26)*: Barnabas went to get Saul to help teach in Antioch. After Saul arrived, the text says they taught a lot of people. But while it was just Barnabas, he focused on encouraging them “to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.” Barnabas didn’t come to Antioch to merely pass on information. Rather, he wanted to produce results. He didn’t communicate to these Christians in terms of what they might know. Rather, he focused on what they needed to do. Both Exhorters and Teachers will teach and preach. However, the Teachers focus more on conveying the truth expecting the hearers to make their own application. Teachers tend to think if the truth will make you free, then if I pass on the truth, you will get free. The Exhorters focus more on getting a response from the hearers. Yes, they think, the truth will make you free but only if you apply it properly. The Exhorter wants to encourage people to make proper application and grow thereby.
 5. *Exhorters are greatly loved because of their encouragement and positive outlook (Acts 4:36)*: What a nickname. Barnabas’s real name was actually Joseph, but because he was such an encouragement to people, they nicknamed him “son of encouragement.” The word translated “encouragement” is the same as “exhortation” in **Romans 12:8**. Just about everyone loves to be encouraged. So, just about everyone loves an encourager. Folks love Exhorters. They are easily the most popular Teachers and preachers because they tend to make people feel good, even when they have to make them feel bad about something. Because Exhorters tend to be open about their own shortcomings, even when they have to talk to others about their shortcomings it tends to come off well. Exhorters are well-beloved members of the congregation.
- C. If these characteristics fit you, you have a place in the kingdom and this congregation. We need Exhorters like you.

II. The Struggles of an Exhorter.

- A. As with all of the gifts, the Exhorter also has some natural weaknesses and struggles. If you have these weaknesses and struggles, don’t spend time beating yourself up. Certainly, these demonstrate you have room to grow and areas to work on in your life. However, they don’t mean you are bad or un-useful. They simply indicate that you may well be an Exhorter. You have a role and we need you to fill it.
- B. The apostle Peter was another biblical Exhorter. He certainly demonstrated a lot of strengths as well. However, in Peter’s life we can also see some of the struggles Exhorters often face. Here are five we can see in Peter’s life.
 1. *Exhorters can be outspokenly opinionated (Matthew 16:22)*: Can you imagine pulling Jesus aside and rebuking Him? Yet that is exactly what Peter did. Exhorters draw quick conclusions, make snap decisions, and then tell everyone what they are. However, this is almost always out of a desire to be helpful. Exhorters are convinced they have the answers to help people be all that they can be, to help them succeed, and they often jump in where they haven’t been asked. To modify the old saying, Exhorters often jump in where angels fear to tread. But they just want to be helpful. Exhorters will do well to learn not to answer questions that haven’t been asked or offer advice that hasn’t been solicited. But this is hard for Exhorters to do. They have a verbal gift and sometimes they struggle to shut it off.
 2. *Exhorters tend to interrupt with their opinions rather than listening in order to learn (John 13:5-10)*: When Jesus washed the feet of the disciples, He was trying to pass on one of the greatest lessons the disciples needed to learn. But Peter wouldn’t wait around to listen to Jesus’ lesson. No. Peter was sure he knew what the lesson was. He wasn’t going to wait to get done and then let Jesus ask why these disciples allowed Him to perform this menial task. Rather, Peter interrupted Jesus’ teaching with his own opinions. Even as Jesus tried to patiently teach Peter, he kept interrupting even while adapting to new opinions. Again, Exhorters are blessed with a verbal gift. They speak and they speak well. They are quick to draw their conclusions and sometimes that gets them in trouble. While they often draw correct conclusions, sometimes they are way off base. The Exhorter needs to heed the advice of **Proverbs 18:13**, “If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.”
 3. *Exhorters tend toward people-pleasing (Galatians 2:11-14)*: When men were sent by James, the Lord’s brother, to Antioch, Peter ceased to eat with Gentiles. He was concerned about how these Jews would view him. Exhorters, being so focused on other people, want to be liked. As I said above, Exhorters are generally well-beloved. Therefore, it causes them trouble to think that someone might not like them or approve of them. Not to mention, if people don’t like them, how can they be of help to those people? So, Exhorters are in danger of compromising on principles in order to keep their relationships safe. By the way, notice that Barnabas, the other Exhorter we have highlighted in this lesson, also fell prey to this temptation.
 4. *Exhorters can be impulsive (Matthew 14:28-33)*: Have you ever thought about what the other apostles thought when Peter cried out, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water”? I can see some heads shaking and Andrew muttering, “There he goes again.” Peter hadn’t thought this through completely or the winds and waves wouldn’t have presented a problem to him. As we already stated, Exhorters can jump to

quick conclusions and make quick decisions. Because they have a verbal gift, what jumps into their brain often leaps out of their mouth without sufficient thought. No doubt, this turned into a great experience for Peter and provided great lessons for both him and us. Being impulsive is not all bad. After all, it was Peter who on impulse was the first of the disciples to declare Jesus as the Christ. He was willing to go first, stand out front. But without care that impulsiveness can lead to trouble.

5. *Exhorters sometimes promise more than they can deliver (Matthew 26:30-35)*: Peter was sure he would never abandon Jesus. He couldn't imagine of anything happening to turn him away. He was ready to die for Jesus. I believe Peter absolutely meant that. After all, he was the one who attacked the servant of the high priest in the garden. But Peter was wrong. He would fall away just like Jesus said. When you mix the Exhorter's impulsive nature with the desire to please people, you come up with a deadly combination that produces over commitment. As my dad used to say, they will often let their mouths write checks that their behinds simply can't cash. They mean to do what they say. They can't imagine not doing what they say. But they often find themselves in over their heads.

C. If these struggles sound all too familiar to you, your place in the kingdom and this congregation may just be as an Exhorter. Don't beat yourself up too much. As we said earlier, they show areas where you need to grow. But they also demonstrate that you have a place here. We need Exhorters.

III. Opportunities in the local church for the Exhorter to motivate and encourage.

A. There are numerous ways that you can exercise your function as an Exhorter in the work of this congregation. We have a place for you and we need you to ask, "What am I doing with my exhorting ability?" You will see that there is a good deal of overlap between your opportunities and the Teachers from our last lesson. While you both thrive in the same arenas, you will do so for different reasons and accomplish different ends.

B. Some opportunities to exhort for the congregation as a whole.

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| 1. Adult classes | 5. Articles for the website |
| 2. Children's classes | 6. Leading prayer |
| 3. Preaching sermons | 7. Recruiting Christians to fill roles |
| 4. Articles for the bulletin | 8. Training Christians to fill roles |

C. Some opportunities to exhort in your relationship with other Christians.

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| 1. Home Bible studies | 5. Marriage counseling |
| 2. Visitation (home, hospital, nursing homes) | 6. Life-coaching |
| 3. Letters, cards, e-mails | 7. Teen counseling |
| 4. Phone calling | 8. Pray with others |

D. Some opportunities to connect and evangelize.

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| 1. Encouraging friends, neighbors, family in other pursuits | 5. Making positive connections in the community |
| 2. Example of happy and positive living | 6. Inviting others to assemblies |
| 3. Neighborhood Bible studies | 7. Phone calling |
| 4. Studies with co-workers | 8. Visiting guests |

IV. Improving your exhortation (help for the non-Exhorter).

A. As we recognized earlier, not all of us have our greatest gift in exhorting. But we all have some responsibility to grow in exhortation (cf. **II Corinthians 13:11**). Don't beat yourself up for not being as great an Exhorter as Barnabas, but don't think you can entirely avoid all exhorting just because it isn't your greatest gift.

B. So, let's wrap up with a little help for the rest of us. How can we improve our exhorting and through that exhortation motivate and encourage those around us?

1. *Become friends with an Exhorter*: Spend time listening to an Exhorter. How does he or she speak to other people? How do they speak to you? How do they support and encourage others? Mirror that behavior in your own life.
2. *Spend time with other people*: Since Exhorters are all about supporting other people, you can't do any good at exhorting holed up in your own little private cubicle. You have to get out among people. Listen to their hopes and dreams, encourage them. Support them.
3. *Learn to give the same benefit of the doubt you want to receive when you mess up*: Exhorters tend to see people on a spectrum of growth. So, when someone messes up, they don't see them as bad or wrong; they see them as growing. Isn't that how you want to be seen when you mess up? I know I do. If you want to grow in exhortation, start giving folks the benefit of the doubt. I'm not saying ignore their mess ups and sins. I'm simply saying don't assume the worst. Assume they are a growing Christian who struggles just like you do.

4. *Place a "10" on everyone's head:* This bit of advice comes from John Maxwell. Exhorters are so encouraging because they value people. They tend to see the potential as Barnabas saw the potential in John Mark. No matter where anyone is on the spectrum of growth and involvement in the church see them for the 10 they can become and start treating them like that.
5. *Think application:* Don't be satisfied with simply passing on some principle or spouting some clichéd proverb. Rather, think application. How does what you are saying to someone really apply in real life? How can it actually help them in a real way? Think in steps and processes that will improve and empower someone's life and then share that with a healthy dose of you-can-do-it.

Conclusion:

We all have a place in the kingdom and this congregation. Is yours as an Exhorter? What will you do about it? When and where will you exhort? Don't be embarrassed if you can't do what someone else does. Don't be ashamed because you don't have someone else's gift. Make sure you are pursuing the gift God has given you. We need the encouragement, edifying, and building up you can offer through your exhortation. As **Ephesians 4:15-16** explains, you are a joint in this congregation and we need the exhortation with which you are equipped. If you are an Exhorter, the question for you is what will you do with God's gift? Are you exhorting? How? When? Where? Who?