



The Caller

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Confidence Corner John F. Board

In this week's *Confidence Corner*, we want to consider the concept of encouragement. The Holy Spirit has provided for all of us God's written revelation. The Holy Spirit fulfills the role of a *paraklētos*. This is such a rich word and it is very difficult to convey its full meaning with just a few words. One of the many aspects we must certainly include that of "encouragement." I don't know about you, but the Bible is definitely an encouragement to me.

A form of this same word is used as the nickname of the Joseph —Barnabas, son of *paraklēsis*. For in the part Barnabas played in the early years of the Christian mission this ministry of the Paraclete was seen time and again, as he took the side of the misunderstood and the rejected, and proved to be for them a son of encouragement, or as we might put it, a tower of strength.

For people to be an encouragement is something the church still needs. I want to focus on his ministry of encouragement by considering three of the objects of his *paraklēsis*.

1. The Gentiles

It was one thing for Peter to be forced reluctantly to preach to Cornelius, but a deliberate outreach to Gentiles in Antioch seems to be a role Barnabas was willing to undertake. Barnabas was a good choice for this role. He was a Jewish Christian among those who dispersed (Acts 4:36) but also had Jerusalem connections (Col. 4:10); but his supreme qualification was his character that, as we shall see, made him a natural ambassador.

"When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad"(11:23). I love that. Perhaps he too had his doubts back in Jerusalem, but Barnabas was not the man to let prejudice stand up against the grace of God. He looked at a situation from the positive side, and he saw the grace of God where many would have seen only a disturbing inclusion of a dangerous enemy. Barnabas found himself the leader of a great missionary effort by the church of the early days.

2. The Enemy

Saul knew from his own experience the difference between Barnabas' openness to the grace of God and the attitude of the Jerusalem church leaders. "When he had come to Jerusalem he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple" (Acts 9:26). I can't say that I blame them. "But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared to them" that his story was true and that his subsequent behavior had proved it (Acts 9:27). So Saul, who could so easily have been left out in the cold, was brought into the family. Thank God for Barnabas, who was ready to see the grace of God and act upon that grace. We still need him in many Christian situations today.

3. The One Who Turned Back

Another person encouraged by Barnabas was John Mark, his relative from Jerusalem. Barnabas took him, like he had Saul, to join the team ministry in Antioch (Acts 12:25). John Mark later proved his worth as Paul's right-hand man (Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11). But before that time came, John Mark's prospects looked no better than did those of Saul when the Jerusalem church didn't want to know him. He dropped out of the first evangelistic tour from Antioch (Acts 13:13; 15:38). Whatever the reason, it was enough to make Paul write him off as a failure; that could have been the end of John Mark's effectiveness as a Christian missionary.

But, it was Barnabas, the son of encouragement, who took the side of John Mark. Convinced of John Mark's effectiveness to the cause, Barnabas acted in the most un-Barnabas-like way. He was one side of a sharp contention (the Greek is *paroxysm!*) with Paul. This contention brought about the end of a partnership that had meant so much to them both (Acts 15:36-40).

How many potential John Marks, I wonder, have been lost through a failure of the church to understand that to fail does not mean one is a failure? Many of us are too apt to break the spirit of such a one. Thank God that Barnabas was different.

In God, We Still Trust: But For How Long?

When our nation was founded, there was an emphasis upon God. We longed for religious freedom. Our money still is stamped with “In God We Trust.” Our monuments around this country often bear His name. When someone is sworn into public office, is it still not the Bible upon which they place their hands? In courtrooms, is the Bible still used to swear someone in?

If I went back in history I am confident shortly after the founding of our country—when people were provided the religious freedoms they sought—that many became lax in their desire to follow God. In my lifetime, whether I long for it or not, public prayer and the Bible has been removed from schoolrooms. Madalyn Murray O’Hair was an activist supporting the separation of church and state but her drive was based in her atheistic mindset. Murder has been legalized (Abortion); marriage has been de-emphasized first (living together/fornication) and attacked at its very core (LGBTQIA). Media has pushed and weak mindsets have followed.

Then not long ago came 911. As Americans saw the horrors of that day, leadership nationwide began once again to speak about God. Different music genres turned a focus to God. People in mass followed and began to look to God. “What a great time in our country,” I thought! But then something happened.

Threats were removed from our lives. People began to become comfortable trusting in the strength of a nation and leadership. Our economy began to flourish and trust once again turned to money. It did not take too long—and God was once again forgotten.

Recently with the impact of the coronavirus, we once again have many turning to God. Psalm 46:10 comes to mind when I think of these past few weeks and months. “Be still and know that I am God.” Perhaps more clearly the passage could be translated, “Cease what you are doing and learn of me—that I am the One and Only God.” We have such an opportunity provided to us once again. Will we turn to God? If Internet feeds indicate anything, God was a focus yesterday for sure. But how long will our focuses upon God last? Well, I guess that depends on each one of us!

For many of you, the coronavirus did not really impact your relationship with God; you were already placing Him as the center (hub) of your life! For some perhaps these past few weeks have awakened them to their need for God. Perhaps the things they once thought were important are now seen for what they are—fun but not the most important focus of our lives.

I pray that people’s focus will always be upon God. I am so thankful that we have a God who is longsuffering (2 Pet. 3:). But as Scripture reveals, that longsuffering nature will not overcome those who seek to turn away from Him. Please know that, if in this sobering time, you seek to be right with God but are not certain what you need to do, reach out to me and I will seek to help you find God and the peace His blessing can bring to your life.

John F Board

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