

Partners of Encouragement as Illustrated in Acts

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Paul thanks the Philippian church for being in “partnership in the gospel” (Phil. 1:5). There are many layers to this partnership, much like the layers of an onion. One of these “layers” of gospel partnership in the great gospel missions endeavour is to be partners of encouragement. The book of Acts illustrates well how we can all be partners of encouragement in missions.

There are many ways of translating “encouragement” in the New Testament; but the basic essence of meaning remains the same whether we translate it as exhortation, comfort, building-up or encouraging – namely to give to another the courage to keep moving forward.

Let us look briefly at five ways we can be partners of encouragement for foreign missions as found in the New Testament book of Acts.

1. Partners of Encouragement – Financially and Mercifully (Acts 4:36, 37)

Barnabas was his nickname; his real name was Joseph. He had a glowing reputation, which was evidenced through the meaning of his nickname – Barnabas – son of encouragement. He sold some land which he had acquired somehow, and he gave the proceeds to the apostles to use for fellow believers in distress. Barnabas was giving courage and hope and confidence to poverty stricken believers. Poverty can easily take away hope and courage. Barnabas’ action shows him being a partner of encouragement with the wider Church that others might receive the blessings of mercy and encouragement.

When we help financially those in need in the Church around the world, we are partners of encouragement.

2. Partners of Encouragement – in the Manner of Visiting Churches (Acts 11:23b; 15:32)

The gospel had spread north to the city of Antioch. The Jerusalem church decided to send a visitor to see this new group of believers in the north. They sent Barnabas as the visitor. What a perfect choice. He did not go with a critical spirit nor as a fault finder. He went there as a great encourager with the right words at the right time. Barnabas possessed the disposition spoken of in Proverbs 15:32 and 25:11 and 25.

Short-term visitors are a reality today in missionary work. The manner and spirit in which we go out to visit can bring encouragement or the opposite. What tremendous opportunities exist for construction visitors, VBS visitors, etc. May grace characterize our visits, not offense.

3. Partners of Encouragement – in the Process of Guidance (Acts 18:27)

Apollos was living in Ephesus, in modern Turkey. He had been graciously instructed in the home of Priscilla and Aquila – the seminary in their house. He now had a desire to cross the Aegean Sea and go over to Greece (Achaia) to spread the gospel. Desires for good can be encouraged or discouraged by those brothers and sisters close-at-hand. In Apollos’ case, the brethren surrounded him with wonderful encouragement in the process of guidance. They recognized his refined knowledge, his holy desire and the gospel need. Apollos received their encouragement to go forward into gospel ministry. Their letter was a form of practical encouragement.

You will meet someone who may have such godly desires and ability and feel called overseas, and you will be part of that process of guidance. May we be encouragers in the

process at the right time. Perhaps it will be to bring them into that network where things will start to happen.

4. Partners of Encouragement – Leaders Set the Example for Members (Acts 16:40)

The Lord had just opened a new mission field – Europe! Then followed persecution of the two leaders, Paul and Silas. They were released from jail, and I suspect most would have said right at that point, “Let’s leave town and get out of here immediately.” Instead, Paul and Silas go straight back to the house of Lydia, one of the first believers in the European city of Philippi. Why? Answer – to give encouragement to the new believers. To tell them that, yes, persecution and trials are real, but the victory is the Lord’s. The leaders were bringing courage to the new church members of Philippi. Leaders set an example to others. If they had simply left, encouragement would have been lost – discouragement could easily have ensued.

Leaders, make sure you set an example before the members of being encouragers, not discouragers. May the passion of leaders inflame others.

5. Partners of Encouragement – Members as Encouragers to Leaders (Acts 28:15)

The last chapter of Acts gives a wonderful example of being partners of encouragement. Paul is nearing Rome. Believers hear that he is near – the believers’ grapevine at work! They gather with him at Three Taverns, and their very presence had an immediate effect upon Paul – he was encouraged – new courage came over him to persevere. What was ahead of him in Rome? Death? Martyrdom? But these unnamed Christians minister to the great apostle in his moment of weakness.

Ultimately it is always a partnership in gospel work. The leaders need the encouragement of the members. There is not a hierarchy for encouragement. It is not about our name – no names are mentioned here in Acts 28:15. We just want to see good done for the Kingdom.

We are partners in the world-wide gospel enterprise. One layer of that partnership is the way we are encouragers. The Lord Jesus is our great encourager, advocate and hope. As we are encouraged in the Lord, so let us encourage one another in the missionary mandate.