

15. Building Relationships and the Gift of Exhortation

In our last three topics, we have looked at ways to use the spiritual gifts of prophecy, serving, and teaching to build relationships for the purpose of evangelism. Today, we will be looking at the gift of exhorting and some effective ways to build relationships with non-Christians if we have this gift. Those of you who have this gift will see some ways that God can use your gift to share the Gospel effectively. Those of you who do not have this gift will have a better understanding of why people with this gift build relationships in a different way than you do.

We might use the following definition for the gift of exhorting: “To encourage the saints to love, to good works and to godly living by giving specific steps so that the Word of God will not be blasphemed” - 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10; 1 Timothy 6:1-2; Titus 2:4-5, 15. In relation to other Christians, the Christian who has the gift of exhorting will tend to emphasize growth toward spiritual maturity so that the Word of God will not be blasphemed. He will urge others to pursue a course of conduct which is always perspective, looking toward the future. The person with this gift will often encourage individuals to take small specific steps which will help them work toward spiritual development and spiritual goals.

Since the primary meanings of the word “exhort” or “exhortation” include *to help, to encourage, to comfort and to strengthen*, this is a gift that can also be used very effectively in building relationships for the purpose of sharing the Gospel. We are living in a world where there is such an emphasis on bad news and evil that almost everyone is open to encouragement. The following are some of the ways that the person with this gift will build relationships with non-Christians:

1. In 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10, Paul “encourages” the Thessalonians to show more and more brotherly love to one another. In the New Testament, this word is used to speak of the love that we are to show to one another as Christians. However, we are not limited to showing this love to just Christians. Instead, we are given strength by Christ to show this love to all people whether they are Christians or not. The person who has the gift of exhortation will often find more ways than most Christians to show this kind of love to those who are not yet Christians. This will be done both through words and acts which encourage the other person.

2. In 1 Timothy 6:1-2, Paul tells Timothy to “teach and encourage” people to treat their masters (employers) with all honor. This means that we will honor our employers by our good works whether our employer is a Christian or a non-Christian. The way we work on our job will have a great impact both on our employer and on the other workers. Although all Christians are to show this honor and respect by the way we work, the person with the gift of exhortation will use the way he works to provide opportunities to encourage his employer and the other employees. This will often open opportunities to build relationships and then to share the Gospel.

3. In Titus 2:15, we see that the message of Christ’s return is something that we are to talk about as we speak, encourage and rebuke those around us. When we remind Christians of the blessed hope that we have of Christ’s return, we encourage them especially when they are going through difficult times. However, the return of Christ is also something that one with the gift of exhortation

will often use to build relationships with the non-Christian. When a person who is not yet a Christian is going through difficult times, they are looking for someone to encourage them. In the process of encouraging the non-Christian in difficult times, we will build relationships and have the opportunity to present the hope of eternal life that a person can have who repents and places their trust in Christ.

4. In Titus 2:4-6, we see that older men and women often have the opportunity to encourage younger men and women. This opportunity to give wise counsel provides an ideal way to build relationships between those who are older and those who are younger both with Christians and with non-Christians. A person who has the gift of exhortation will often look for opportunities to share wise counsel with those who are younger including those who are not yet Christians. In the process of sharing wise counsel with those who are not yet Christians, there will usually be opportunities to share the Gospel as we pray for the Lord to open the door for us to share the Word as a part of our counsel.

5. In James 1:19-20, we are told the importance of being a good listener. Those verses tell us to be quick to listen and slow to speak. Being a good listener will always build relationships with people whether they are Christians or non-Christians. The person who has the gift of exhortation knows that he has to listen to the other person so that he knows how to encourage him. Since the person with the gift of exhortation will usually encourage a non-Christian, that person will become more and more open to listen in return when the Christian shares the Gospel with him.

6. In 1 Corinthians 4:15-16, Paul talks about providing an example for the Corinthian believers to follow. He said that although there were many who would try to lead by rules and severe discipline, he had the care and concern of a loving father and encouraged the Corinthians to follow his example. We build relationships both with Christians and non-Christians as we provide an example for them to follow. The person who has the gift of exhortation will use his example as a key way to encourage others. As he encourages those who are not yet Christians by his godly example of care and concern, he will have opportunities to share the message of repentance and faith.

7. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, God tells us that He comforts us so that we will be able to comfort others with the same comfort with which we have been comforted. Because the gift of exhortation causes a person to want to comfort and encourage others, he will see more opportunities than most Christians to provide comfort both to Christians and to non-Christians. As he comforts those who are not yet Christians who are in sorrow or trouble, the Lord will open opportunities to share the Gospel as the source of lasting comfort.

8. In 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, we see that Paul says that we are ambassadors for Christ. God has given us the opportunity to encourage people to be reconciled to God. Today, we are living in a day of fractured relationships and people are hurting. Because the person with the gift of exhortation focuses on how to encourage others, he hears people when they are hurting because of these broken relationships. As a result, he will often have opportunities to help them see that through reconciliation with God they will lay a foundation to be reconciled to those with whom

they have broken relationships.

As we can see, the person with the gift of exhortation is likely to build relationships with those who are not yet Christians by finding a variety of different ways to comfort and encourage. As a result, a person with this gift will often be able to build relationships with those who are hurting. If this gift is a spiritual gift that you have, may the Lord use you mightily to build relationships and share the Gospel with those who are hurting. For those of you who do not have this gift, develop a close friendship with someone who does so that they can give you ideas about how to build relationships with those who are hurting. May the Lord richly bless you as you reach out to non-Christians who need encouragement and comfort.