

TO LIFT OTHERS UP IS FOR YOUR OWN GOOD!

Today's Text: Col. 4: 7-15

Extracts:

Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. I am sending him to you for this purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts, with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will make known to you all things which are happening here [Col. 3: 7-9]

On Friday, 14 August 2015, the United States Secretary of State, John Kerry, hoisted the US flag above the re-opened US embassy in Havana, Cuba.¹ He thus became the first US Secretary of State since 1945 to visit Cuba, following the break in relations over the Fidel Castro communist takeover in that neighbouring island nation. Kerry's tenure has also been marked by the recent signing of the historic multinational nuclear deal with Iran. He became President Obama's cabinet member in 2013, following Hilary Clinton's resignation to concentrate on her presidential bid in 2016. But the story goes way back to 2004 when Kerry ran as the unsuccessful Democratic Presidential candidate. During the primaries, he came across a rising star in the State of Illinois in the person of Barack Obama. Kerry nominated Obama to give the keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention (DNC) in Boston, Massachusetts. That address was to launch Obama into national limelight and, ultimately, to the White House after winning the 2008 Presidential election and a reelection in 2012.

What lesson can we learn from that story? It is that Kerry's lifting up of Obama in 2004 became a major opening for himself and his own future greatness in American history. So, uplifting others may actually be for your own future good. You may be a parent or guardian, a teacher or pastor or a boss in the work place. What is your attitude to those under your care? Are you building them up or using them for your selfish ends until they get used up? In today's Bible verses, Paul lists a number of people he met and worked with during his missionary journeys that he now had to depend on. Let us learn some principles from him that can help us to make that good turn for our own future good.

¹ Story is based on the following sources: "Kerry marks opening of US Embassy in Havana, critics rip 'diplomacy for show,'" *FoxNews.com*, August 14, 2015, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2015/08/14/kerry-in-havana-for-reopening-us-embassy-tough-negotiations-ahead/> and "2004 Democratic National Convention keynote address," From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2004_Democratic_National_Convention_keynote_address

1. Background: Paul always uplifted those around him

God had used Moses to bring Pharaoh to his knees to finally allow the children of Israel to leave Egypt. They miraculously crossed the Red Sea by foot and came to Mount Sinai where God gave them the Ten Commandments. In preparation for what was supposed to be the final lap, God commanded Moses to send twelve men (one per tribe) to spy out the Promised Land, to see what the land looked like, whether its current inhabitants were strong or weak, few or many, and if their cities were like camps or strongholds. The spy chosen from the tribe of Ephraim was called Hoshea, the son of Nun. *Hoshea means “Salvation” but Moses changed his name to Joshua or “Yeshua,” the shortened form of “Yehoshua” which means “Yahweh is Salvation”* [Num. 13: 16].

We are not told why Moses changed Hoshea’s name to Joshua. As it turned out, only he and Caleb brought back a good report that encouraged the children of Israel to go on to take over the Promised Land [Num. 14: 24, 38]. Along the way, Moses himself also offended God by striking the rock twice (instead of speaking to it) to bring out water for the thirsty people the second time. Consequently, God refused Moses entry into the Promised Land [Num. 20: 1-12], even when he had repented and prayed for grace [Deut. 3: 23-26]. Instead, God said to Moses, “Take *Joshua* the son of Nun . . . a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; set him before Eleazar the priest [and] all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight.” Moses should give him some of his authority and at his word, the people were to go out or come in [Num. 27: 12-23]. *Moses did not enter the Promised Land but God used Joshua that Moses had mentored to lead the children of Israel into it* [Josh. 11: 23].

Instructively, God called Moses’ successor Joshua, the name that Moses had given him. It was Joshua that brought the children of Israel into the Promised Land but thousands of years later, when Jesus was transfigured before some of His disciples, it was Moses and Elijah that appeared to them, talking with the Lord [Matt. 17: 1-3]. What does that suggest? It is that Moses did not lose his place before God and his people whereas it was the successor that he had mentored that completed his mission for God.

Right now, you are in a position to do what Moses did. You may be a minister of God, pastoring a flourishing congregation. *What is your attitude to the young men and women that you are working with? You may be a teacher or guardian over a group of precocious children. How do you see them and their future? You may be a political leader who has just won a major election. How do you see your advisers and officers? You may be somebody in a position to decide the fate of your enemy, that person that has pestered your life these past few years. What do you plan to do- avenge or forgive, trash or rehabilitate? Are you ready to make that good turn for others that may either haunt or help your cause in the future? That is where Paul’s final greetings to the Colossian church will be most useful to us in today’s study.*

Paul was unable to return to Colosse by himself. So, he was sending his associates to the believers there, and his choice of words indicates the kind of relationships that he had built up with each and every one of them. The following examples illustrate that point:

a) *Beloved brothers*

Paul referred to both Tychicus and Onesimus as his beloved brothers. Tychicus would tell them “***all the news about me*** [for] I am sending him to you for this very purpose, ***that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts.***” Onesimus “who is one of you ... ***will make known to you all things which are happening here***” [Col. 4: 7-9].

Examine the highlighted words and you will see how much confidence Paul had in them. They had the authority to speak about and for him. They could do for the Colossians what Paul himself could have done for them if he had come by himself. Therefore, Tychicus and Onesimus had been empowered by Paul. Elsewhere, when Paul sent Tychicus to the Ephesian church, he wrote, “That you may also know my affairs and how I am doing, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make all things known to you... that you may know our affairs, and that he may comfort your hearts” [Eph. 6: 21-22]. Why do you think the Colossians would not believe in and trust people that Paul had trusted so much?

b) *Fellow prisoner and worker*

Paul also sent to the Colossians greetings from Aristarchus, “my fellow prisoner.” He asked them to welcome John Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, if he came to them, and Justus, both “fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision [for they had proved] a comfort to me”[Col. 4: 10-11].

Aristarchus (with Gaius) was Paul’s travel companion during the riot in Ephesus caused by Demetrius and his fellow silversmiths who saw their trade threatened by Paul’s mission [Acts 19: 21-41]. He was one of the prisoners with Paul on the journey to Rome [Acts 27:2]. John Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, became estranged from Paul when he abandoned them during their first missionary journey to return to Jerusalem [Acts 13: 13]. Later, when Barnabas wanted his cousin to travel with them on a consolidation trip to places where they had sown the word of God, Paul refused. It led to a sharp disagreement, such that Paul went with Timothy and Silas while Barnabas went with his cousin [Acts 15: 36-16: 1]. In spite of that, Paul had kind words to the Colossians about Mark- to receive him well should he come to them. Indeed, Paul practised what he preached

about love [1 Cor. 13: 4-7]. His attitude to his associates spoke volumes for his ministry during his absence.

c) *Bond servant of Christ*

Paul called Epaphras “a bondservant of God.” He happened to be one of the Colossians. Paul sent greetings from Epaphras who was “always labouring [for them] in prayers [that they might] stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” Paul bore witness of him as having a great zeal for them and believers in Laodicea and Hierapolis also [Col. 4: 12-13]. Can you imagine how elated Epaphras felt to know that the “little” that he was doing had been noticed by his “boss” to even report it to his kinsmen back home? ***By making Epaphras big in the eyes of his people, Paul became bigger in the eyes of the Colossians.***

d) *Beloved physician*

Paul also recorded greetings to them from “Luke the beloved physician” and Demas [v. 14]. Luke is the author of the Gospel according to Luke and the book of Acts. With the clinical details of a family doctor, Luke documented the perfect humanity of the Son of God [Lk 1: 1-4] and the missionary zeal of the early church leaders, especially Peter [Acts 1-12] and Paul [Acts 13-28]. Paul called him “the beloved physician” and even when in his old age Paul seemed abandoned, he could say, “Only Luke is with me” [2 Tim. 4: 11]. Luke was a good man but he was endeared to Paul because of the spiritual leadership that he provided to all of them. Did Paul not thus benefit more?

e) *Brethren*

Paul also asked the Colossians to greet the brethren who were in Laodicea, and Nymphas (and the church in his house) [Col. 4: 15]. Nothing and nobody escaped Paul’s memory! That is more remarkable when you realise that Paul dictated his letter to the Colossians to Timothy [Col. 1: 1] and he gave due credit to everybody around himself. He saw all those around himself as brethren.

From the foregoing, we can see that ***Paul was a mentor by choice, not by chance.*** As we have seen from Paul’s relationship with his associates and fellow workers in his ministry among the Gentiles, God brought them to him by chance for His purpose. What Paul did with them or for them was by choice, based on his own fear of God and his understanding of the mission that Christ gave him. Can you do likewise?

2. What has that taught you to do?

The following lessons, among so many others, need to be noted:

a) *It is a privilege to mentor others!*²

God's purpose does not change but He can change those who will execute it. For example, it was God who chose Saul as the king of Israel. When he failed, God chose David in his place. It was Jesus that chose Judas Iscariot as one of His twelve apostles. When he failed, by betraying his Master, another apostle, Matthias, was chosen to replace him [**Acts 1: 15-25**]. ***Therefore, always see those that you come across by chance (as subordinates, children or associates) as a rare privilege that God has given you to demonstrate your love for and fear of Him by uplifting them to attain God's purpose for their lives.***

Recall how Elijah selected and mentored Elisha to succeed him. God specifically told Elijah to anoint "Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholahas" as "prophet in [his] place." You cannot miss such a clear description of his successor! Elijah went there and met Elisha plowing the field with twelve oxen. He passed by him and threw his mantle on him. Elisha left the oxen and "followed Elijah and became his *servant*," that is, his assistant or apprentice or mentee [**1 Kgs 19: 16-21**]. In due course, the faithful servant obtained a double portion of his master's power after Elijah had been taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot [**2 Kgs 2: 1-13**]. God's purpose was fulfilled. At the Transfiguration of Jesus, guess whom the disciples saw with the Lord apart from Moses? It was Elijah [**Matt. 17: 1-3**]. ***Therefore, do not choose people to uplift just to please self, family or members of your congregation or out of mere sympathy. You could be setting traps for your own downfall!***

b) *Therefore empower rather than use others*

Some people are reluctant to share their experience/talents/skills with others, especially mentees, for fear that they could be betrayed in due course. They could lose control. That is quite possible. However, ***for every Judas Iscariot, there are eleven loyal disciples.*** Therefore, you do God's bidding by empowering others to achieve His purpose for bringing them to you. In due course, your own blessings will come.

For example, after Saul's (Paul's) conversion following his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, believers in Jerusalem were scared of him and when "he tried to join the disciples... they were afraid of him and did not believe that he was a disciple." However, Barnabas took him to the apostles and vouched for his authentic conversion [**Acts 9: 26-27**]. See

² For more on mentoring, read "Are You a Mentor or a Predator?" *Weekly Bible Study Series*, Vol. 11 No. 31; 10 Oct. 2010; http://biblesourcecentre.com/Volume_11/Areyouamentororapredator.pdf

what happened when prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch were ministering to the Lord. The Holy Spirit said, “Now *separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them*” [Acts 13: 1-2]. The Holy Spirit mentioned Barnabas first! So, Barnabas helped himself when he helped to make Saul (Paul) acceptable to the early church some years back.

You can empower others through advice and guidance, principled conduct, love and forgiveness, among others. Always remember that the best place to hide is in the open. So, be transparent and God-fearing in all you do.

c) *Their advocacy is better than your propaganda!*

The word of God says, “Let another man praise you and not your own mouth; a stranger and not your own lips” [Prov. 27: 2]. *To sing your own praises is propaganda. When others speak of you, that is advocacy.* If Paul had been a modern day minister, he would have sent his associates to show videos of his sermons wherever they went! But, in Paul’s own words, “we preach Christ crucified ... to the Jews ... and to the Greeks [Gentiles]” [1 Cor. 1: 23]. That is advocacy, not propaganda! That should also be your suite.

Remarkably, Paul never claimed authorship of most of his letters to the churches without adding his “stenographers.” For example, he mentioned Timothy in his letters to the Corinthians [2 Cor. 1: 1], Philippians [Phil. 1:1], Colossians [Col. 1: 1], Thessalonians [1 & 2 Thess. 1:1] and Philemon [Phil. 1]. The leader of the early church, Peter, writing about Paul, said, “Our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you ... in all his epistles ... somethings hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures” [2 Pet. 3: 15-16]. *Paul got the credit, not those who worked with him! That is the point in today’s study.*

3. Conclusion: See how Jesus turned mere fishermen into His global disciples!

Peter and six fellow apostles of Jesus tried to return to fishing after His resurrection but they caught nothing after wasting a whole night. Jesus appeared to them and, after feeding them breakfast from fish that He did not take from the miraculous draught that He had given them, said to Peter, “Do you love Me more than these?” He went on to ask Peter to feed His lambs and His sheep [Jn 21: 1-17]. Remarkably, those mere fishermen around the Sea of Galilee formed the core for taking the Gospel of Christ “to the end of the earth” [Acts 1: 1-8].

That is Christ’s call to you this morning. Uplift that person God has brought your way. Then, God will use that point of contact to uplift you. Alleluia!