

Be a *Parakletos*!

Someone Who Comes Alongside

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Summary: You may realize that the Holy Spirit is called a “*parakletos*” four times in scripture. Plus, Jesus is called our “Advocate” in 1 John 2:1, which is also from the word “*parakletos*.” But how about you and me? Be motivated, inspired and moved as you hear how we are also called to be a *parakletos*, if we are part of the body of Christ.
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Greetings, brothers and sisters in the Messiah, members of the House of God scattered abroad. Regardless of the believing organization you normally attend, God’s family, the church, is not an organization of man, but a spiritual organism. A warm Sabbath hello to you.

Are you a *parakletos*? That’s a Greek word used exactly five times in the Bible. Five is the number of grace. I’ll bet you lie awake at night thinking about being a real *parakletos* (chuckle). That word *parakletos* comes from the Greek verb *parakaleo*. Try to vaguely remember that because it will come into this message today near the end.

Believe it or not, our Father has sent His *parakletos* to us, the Holy Spirit. Our King – Yeshua the Savior - is Himself also called a *Parakletos* in 1 John 2:1, where it is translated “advocate.” If Jesus is a *parakletos*, and if we are part of His body, should we not also be a *Parakletos*? You will see by the end of this message that each of Yahweh’s children are indeed called to be a *parakletos*.

So what is a *parakletos*? What does it mean to be a *parakletos*? I’ll illustrate it by sharing something that happened to us and show how a brother in Christ became a living *parakletos* to us.

An Example of a Parakletos in our Lives

In December 1982, my wife and I went through the terrifying and very sad experience of finding our baby boy lying lifeless, his face a deep blue color, not breathing, right there on our bed. Any of you who have lost a child know that though indeed time heals, you never ever quite “get over” it. I’ve also lost my father and mother, cousins, uncles and aunts, one of our adopted brothers just disappeared some years ago – but all of them put together, did not come close to the feeling of grief and shock we felt when it was our own son.

Anyway, our first reaction was to be by ourselves, not answer the phone, to go nowhere, do nothing – just grieve. So I actually even had word go out to the church that we needed some private alone time. You’ll actually see this happen quite often when people have to first deal with the death of their child. The mother and father in particular should be remembered in these times.

So, our phone didn’t ring. Nobody came over after the word went out. But by the next day, I was dying to have some support, encouragement and love from my believing brothers and sisters. But I had told everyone to let us alone for a while.

Anyway, the next morning I went ahead and called a fellow minister-friend of ours, who lived 4 hours away. He had not heard about the death of our son but he simply asked, "Would you like us to come over?" I readily said, "Yes, we would."

In less than 4 hours, he and his wife were knocking at our door. I guess they must have instantly picked up a few things, jumped in their van and left.

We needed someone alongside of us right then. We felt like a shipwreck. In such a situation, it would be nice to have another strong ship come alongside and help – maybe take you on board the healthy ship and provide for your needs. When the Titanic sank, another ship - the Carpathia -- came to the area where Titanic had sunk and saved the people in lifeboats. Though they were late, I'm sure those in lifeboats were happy to see another ship come alongside and rescue them.

In the same way, at that moment with the death of our son, we felt hopeless, sad, and helpless – and badly needed some help to get through this. We needed a comforter. We needed a friend. We needed a helper. Yes, I know – the Holy Spirit should have been all of that, and was. Our Father in heaven was certainly with us. But even the most believing saint, in one of those lifeboats from the Titanic, would have been relieved to see a ship come alongside right then.

Someone who would come alongside you in your time of need would be called in Greek a "*parakletos*," or in English religious usage (not every day common parlance), a *paraclete*. I'm saying in this message today – think about being a *parakletos* to someone who could really use someone coming alongside. When was the last time you did that for someone? We'll be talking about that today.

A Parakletos Ship

In the ancient Greek world, I'm told that when a vessel was out of commission and was listless in the water, they had specific ships that were called "*parakletos* ships" that would go to the rescue, and go alongside the listless one, and help it get back to shore – much the way perhaps a tug boat would today. They would at least save the people on board the disabled ship. That was a welcome sight, a real *parakletos*.

Back in those days ship's captains didn't have radio, internet, and satellite – and sometimes it was even impossible to let other vessels know you were in a SOS situation. But they could signal by fire, light, or other methods – but usually when your ship was disabled, you were a goner.

Even today – this may surprise you – 100-200 merchant ships, every single year, just suddenly disappear on the high seas. We know now there are giant 90' waves that can suddenly appear in the middle of the ocean and sink modern ships. The salt water disables all the electronics, so communications become impossible. I watched a recent documentary on TV on it. You can Google this and check it out, I'm sure. I'll say again – every year, 100-200 merchant ships just plain vanish.

Imagine what it would have been like back in the day when you had a small sailing ship caught in the crosshairs of a Level 5 Hurricane! How nice it would have been to have had a ship later on come alongside and save you and your fellow sailors.

A *parakletos* ship was one which would comfort the discouraged sailors, feed them and refresh them, for many days may have passed since they had last eaten.

The promised Parakletos from God

Now, some of you will immediately recognize that name or word as something our Savior said He would send after His departure back to the Father's throne in Heaven. Let's read this.

John 14:15-18

15 "If you love Me, keep My commandments. 16 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another **Helper** (KJV: Comforter; Greek Parakletos), that He may abide with you forever — 17 the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.

The KJV translation for the Greek word *parakletos* is "comforter." Parakletos includes the concept of a comforter, but is so much more than that. NKJV says "helper". That word *parakletos* is used only 5 times in the Scriptures, and is used mostly in reference to the Holy Spirit, but also to our Savior Himself. In 1 John 2:1, where it says we have an "advocate" in Jesus, the word is actually from the Greek "Parakletos." Five times total, the number of grace.

So Parakletos can also mean "comforter, helper, encourager, advocate or defender." In the "old testament" (not sure we should be calling God's inspired word that the apostles preached exclusively from, as "old"), the Living God revealed Himself as Yahweh, the Eternal One, the Almighty. Then He sent His Son, Yeshua – meaning "Salvation." And now we have become the temple of the Spirit of God, His promised "parakletos."

Is the concept of being a *parakletos* to be limited to the Spirit of God and to the Son of God? Or are we not supposed to be growing more and more into the very image of the Messiah, more today than yesterday, more tomorrow than today? Are WE not to be exhibiting the life of the resurrected Jesus of Nazareth in our day-to-day lives? If HE is a parakletos, would we not also be a parakletos if His life is shining through ours?

So that's what we're talking about today: Being a *parakletos* to others.

I want to say also that I saw a good blog on this very subject from Lenny Cacchio. He's a good man in our Master's service.

Today, I'm going to explain that Father above has given us His parakletos too, a come-alongside.

PARAKLETOS (par-ak'-lay-tos): an intercessor, consoler.

According to *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, the word "Comforter" – "refers to the Holy Spirit. The word means literally, 'called to one's side' for help. The translation 'Comforter' covers only a small part of the meaning as shown in the context. The word 'Helper' would be a more adequate translation. The Spirit does a great deal for disciples besides comforting them, although to comfort was a part of His work for them.

Being a Parakletos to others

If Father had to grade the level of parakletos we have each been, what would He say? Have we been willing to readily be that someone coming alongside those who are needy, down and hurting?

Sometimes, when someone is really down, or having a series of tough things happening in their lives – they're frankly not very much fun to be around. It's a known fact, that once a person is confined to a nursing home – an environment most of us don't really enjoy being in – that that person's loved ones seldom come visit. It's not easy to be a *parakletos* to someone always in pain physically or emotionally. I've been that person, hard to be around at times, and I've seen so many others like that.

But guess what? When you're down and out is especially when we pray for a *Parakletos* to show up in our life – even though our words might be saying “leave me alone,” just as we experienced when we found our son lifeless on our bed twenty eight years ago. But whether they are fun to be around or not, be a wonderful *parakletos* in those moments.

Now here's another teaching from Master Yeshua:

Luke 14:12-14

Then He also said to him who invited Him, "When you give a dinner or a supper, ***do NOT ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors***, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. 13 But when you give a feast, ***invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind***. 14 And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

But who do we invite over for the special after-sabbath dinners and fun nights we have? Who do we want to be around for the Super Bowl party? I've been on both sides of this equation at times in my life, and I know there are people out there crying out for someone to care enough to call them, email them, ask to be their Facebook friend, or invite them to their home.

I don't think He is saying never invite relatives and friends. He must be saying “don't forget those who aren't relatives and friends, who are alone, who are not wonderfully fun people to be around perhaps – but are also created in our Father's image; invite them too!”

Master Yeshua (Lord Jesus, to the rest of you) lived what He preached. In Matthew 22:1-11 we can read how God furnishes His Son's wedding supper with people who are in every situation and strata of life. In 1 Cor. 1:26, He describes you and me actually – the NOT so great, not so noble, of the world. He called ordinary fishermen, despised tax collectors and just “ordinary Joe's” to change the whole world. Those were His chosen twelve.

Now, how about you and me? Whom would you have picked to be on your team? Who do you invite to come to your dinner party?

In the Marine Corp, they have a tradition of leaving no one behind. Sometimes one of their brothers gets wounded because of a stupid thing he did in the battle. But in the Marines, the others will risk their own lives to bring that comrade back to safety. No one left behind. Semper fidelis. Always faithful. Always there.

This is what draws veterans together – a sense of being willing to die for one another. To be an advocate (1 John 2:1 – parakletos is the Greek) for one another, even when others want to discard a child of God, made in His image, because he/she is too much trouble, not worth it, not the person to be seen with, not someone who can give you any political advantage. Or maybe that person “deserved” what he/she got for doing something foolish, rash or stupid.

Or, am I the only one who has ever had those ungodly thoughts towards a brother or sister in Christ, caught in a bad spot at the moment?

So, we often let our wounded – spiritually or physically – die on the battlefield of life.

Lessons from the Good Samaritan, a good *Parakletos*

Our Savior gave us the story of the Good Samaritan. Remember Yeshua was called a Samaritan. So he says, “OK, call me a Samaritan, and let me tell you about a good Samaritan.”

Luke 10:25-37

25 And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

26 He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?"

27 So he answered and said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.'"

28 And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live."

29 But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

30 Then Jesus answered and said, "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

[**Note:** Whenever we leave spiritual Jerusalem, it's downhill. We're on our way to the city of destruction- - Jericho. Satan came to destroy – and so he gets hurt. Probably shouldn't have been going to Jericho. He was stripped of his dignity – his clothes, etc.]

31 Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side.

[**Note:** perhaps they thought he might be dead, or soon die, and they couldn't risk becoming defiled by a dead body. They had duties in the temple, perhaps. Or maybe – in today's terms – he had a sermonette scheduled and couldn't risk being late “for church.” And don't forget: we don't *go* to church, we *are* the church.]

33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. 34 So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

[**Note:** Look what this Samaritan did: He anointed him. He bound up his wounds. He didn't leave him half-naked but brought him in. This was a donkey. Kings and priests were the

main ones who rode donkeys in the Old Testament. This man raised up the wounded man, put him on his donkey or whatever he had, while he walked beside. In the same way, Yeshua came to serve, and not to be served, and raises us in heavenly places beside Him, and then takes care of us. This Samaritan was elevating this wounded man, treating him like a king. We, too, were dead or dying in our sins – but being rescued or saved, and are being called to be kings and priests.]

35 On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii
[2 days wages, silver coin], gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.'

[**Note:** The Good Samaritan – like Yeshua to us about our sin costs – says, “I have enough to pay for it all!” God pays for *all* our debts spiritually. Yahweh doesn’t feel we have to pay Him back for His gift of salvation. He pays it all.]

36 So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?"
37 And he [the expert in Torah] said, "He who showed mercy on him."

[**Note:** Did you catch that? He couldn’t even bring himself to say the words “the Samaritan!” The hatred and the despising of Samaritans just ran too deep.]

Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

[**Note:** Ouch! Yeshua was basically saying, “Go be like that Samaritan, whom you despise. He was the only one who acted according to the law and loved his neighbor as himself.”]

Who do you know who is “left behind,” wounded, lame, and too risky to be seen anywhere near? Get out of your safe foxhole or bunker, and go find him or her. Show some kindness, a fruit of the Spirit. Kindness sees the need – not the mess-up that caused the problem or need. We’ve all messed up. In those times, we can use a kind word, a hug, a phone call, acceptance, friendship, oneness – and coming together.

Sometimes we feel like a ship that has been shipwrecked. I’ve been there. Have you?

PRACTICAL Ways to BE a *Parakletos*

What are things you can do to become a Parakletos? I’ll mention a few things to get us started, but there must be thousands of ways.

- **Pray to be given the spirit of *parakletos*.** Pray you become someone who comes alongside. Ask Father to make you and me pliable and compassionate, merciful and non-judgmental. It’s the judgmental “he had it coming,” or “she made her bed and now has to lay in it,” that keeps us from being effective *Parakletos* people.
- **Pray for the fruit of the Spirit**, which was the Comforter/parakletos. The fruit of the Spirit simply describes Father and the way He is, and the way His kingdom functions. As members of His kingdom and household, pray He releases that fruit into your life.

- **Follow the Leading of God's Holy Spirit.** When you get an urge to do something, to go alongside someone – do it. Follow the leading of Father's Spirit. The more we obey, the more we will “hear” God's voice, the more we'll be getting in synch with His mind.

Here are some practical things we can maybe be doing:

- **Mother's Day** – call someone whose children have died, or maybe a mother who has been abandoned by her kids, or whose kids are not nearby. Maybe even invite her to come to your home for that day, and tell her you'd be honored if she could be a “mom” to you for a day.
- Someone has quit “religion” and won't attend anywhere – but you know he or she needs a friend, a brother or sister. He or she may be the hurting spiritually. Jesus sought the blind man who had been thrown out of the synagogue because he wouldn't disavow his healer. It would not have been politically correct to be seen with this man who had been thrown out of the synagogue. Even his own parents abandoned him, “for they sought the praises of men more than the praises of God” (said generally of this mind set in John 12:42-43).

John 9:35-38

Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, "Do you believe in the Son of God?"

36 He answered and said, "Who is He, Lord that I may believe in Him?"

37 And Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you."

38 Then he said, "Lord, I believe!" And he worshiped Him.

The one everyone else rejected – who had been blind – was the only one who actually got to “see” and recognize His Redeemer. We too, will see God better, when we seek those who have been discarded by church groups and society. The ones who were really blind were the Pharisees who said they could see. But they missed the Son of God standing in their midst.

Be the person who comes alongside. Be the parakletos. Cross church organizational lines. Have dinners in your home which include people from various church organizations. Bring people together. Become a proactive gatherer of people who would not normally gather together.

Luke 11:23

“He who is not with Me is against Me, and *he who does not gather with Me scatters.*”

Notice he says, “gather with Me – or be considered a scatterer.” Will you and I be seen as a scatterer then? Work with Him in gathering together members of His scattered flock into one body. I know we are already technically one spiritual body. But I mean a body that is effectively working together. We're commanded not to have divisions and splits within His body as we're witnessing.

1 Corinthians 1:10-13

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, **and that there be no divisions among you**, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. 12 Now I say this that each of you says, “I am of Paul, or I am of Apollos,” or “I am of Cephas,” or “I am of Christ.” 13 **Is Christ divided?** Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Yeshua prayed that we be as one, as one as He and father are one! Read that for yourself in John 17:20-23. Are we? Be a gatherer and help make it happen.

If you haven't heard the sermon series I gave on "one body" – in late 2009 and early 2010 please check them out on the website.

I'm talking about this, because it's hard to be a gatherer unless you have the spirit of Parakletos. It's hard to even want to be with "those folks over there" unless we understand we are not to be all split up like we are. Whatever – come alongside God's children, regardless of where they are.

Decide on some ways you can gather people together. I'm not talking about starting yet another organization or sect. I'm saying – be a gatherer of God's children. Put your mind to it. Bring people together. Be a "uniter". Share with me some ideas and I'll mention them in a future message.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 One Big Reason we have Trials and Problems

Please turn next to 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.

Have you ever wondered in the midst of a trial or problem why it is that you are going through it? It may have everything to do with being a better parakletos.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 ASB

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. 4 He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

Sometimes when you are going through a hard time, perhaps you're being allowed to go through this so that you will be one who understands. I promise you: nobody knows what it is like to lose your own child, unless you've been through it. You don't know what it's like to be told you have cancer and eight months to live, until you've been through it. You don't know what it's like to be thrown out of a church, until you've been through it. You don't know what it's like to go through a divorce, or to have whatever life throws at you – until you've been through it. But maybe, just maybe – as 2 Cor. 1:4 says, maybe Father allowed it or even sent it into your life for the very reason that you would be molded into an even more effective comforter to others.

I know *we* understand the pain of someone losing their child, because we went through it. We can let the sore trial make us bitter – and I've been there too – or we can work through that, and let it make us stronger.

One of the biggest things I learned when our son died, for example, is not to overuse Romans 8:28. A grieving dad or mom isn't ready to be told that somehow the death of their son is a good thing and will work out for good.

God promises it will work out for good, but timing is everything. Believe me, the one facing the death of their son or spouse has been told that, probably 100x before you will get a chance to. Don't. Not yet, anyway. They don't need to hear it the 101st time. *What I learned is that the people I appreciated the most were those who didn't say a lot – they were just there and just held us,*

without a word. Sometimes just being there and giving someone a squeeze on their shoulder says volumes more than reminding them about the resurrection, Romans 8:28, and so on.

Later, we can discuss – if the timing is right – the resurrection. They'll hear about that in the sermon or memorial anyway. Right when it first happens, just be there -- silently, strongly, empathetically.

We had one man even tell my wife at our baby's funeral, that Matthew 24 says "woe to those with child" and God was just protecting us. His reasoning was that surely the 2nd coming was just around the corner. My wife graciously thanked him, and, outwardly, I nodded at him, but inwardly it took everything I had in me to keep from decking him. Oh – and by the way -- that was 29 years ago now. And yes, I repented of my thought of wanting to deck him, once I remembered he meant well.

So, I learned that sometimes the best thing is just be there and stand by someone. Let them know you hurt with them, and non-judgmentally let them be what they need to be for a time. Sad, even bitter, depressed – just be there for them. You be the strong link linking up with someone who is going to be a weak link for a while.

Let's take another look at 2 Cor. 1:3-4. The Greek word for "comfort" in 2 Cor. 1:3-4 is not *parakletos*, but the verb **parakaleo** from which the noun "parakletos" comes. *Parakaleo* means to beseech, comfort – very similar to the concept of parakletos, someone coming alongside. I don't think the paraphrase Bible called "the Message" is reliable enough for doctrinal studies, since it is a paraphrase, but in this particular passage in 2 Cor. 1, it seems to really capture the feeling and intent of the writer. Remember we've been saying that a parakletos ship would come alongside a stranded vessel and bring comfort and aid. We've said the meaning of parakletos is "one who comes alongside."

Now listen to how The Message paraphrase Bible words this passage:

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 the Message paraphrase

All praise to the God and Father of our Master, Jesus the Messiah! Father of all mercy! God of all healing counsel! 4 **He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us.**

So be a parakletos. Be a comforter, a person who comes alongside when someone needs you. Be the helper, be the advocate for those who have been abandoned. Stand with them especially when they are repentant – even though they may have done some wrong. After all, we have King Yeshua as our advocate when we are accused by our adversary -- Satan. Are we always being falsely accused? Are there not times we have given Satan ammo against us? In those times, does our Savior- our ultimate parakletos – abandon us? No. We are to become more and more like Him. Don't abandon people, even those who "had it coming to them." Now consider another example.

Lessons from the Weak Link in the Chain

When we have a length of chain — it will be only as strong as its weakest link. If one knows a link is weak or cracked, we cut it off and reconnect the rest. But people aren't metal links that can be cut off and discarded. People are potential children to Abba, and our own brothers or sisters. We can't just cut people out of the link that easily – though many do!

So, what can we do in that case when someone is being a weak link in the chain (just another picture of “the Body of Christ”)? (By the way, we all at times in our lives can be a “weak link” in given moments. Absolutely I have been a weak link at times in my life.) What did Yeshua do?

All through scripture, we see what He did. The story of the prodigal son, the story of the Good Samaritan, the story of lost coin. We talked about how He sought the abandoned and discarded blind man who had just been healed. We see what He says about Israel in Ezekiel 16 – how He saw us lying there in our blood, cast off, abandoned by all – but in His love, He said, “LIVE.” And he came down from majesty in heaven to be with us mere mortals. And by His life, we are made strong. We can now say with Paul, “I can do all things through Christ” (Phil. 4:13). So, stand in the strength of HIS might (Ephesians 6:10).

You want to be strong spiritually? Link up with Him. Part of the meaning of Elohim, or EL – is “the Strong one.” He is also known as “God Almighty” – El Shaddai. Imagine El Shaddai taking up the space you once occupied as a weak link in the chain and saying – “Here, I’m with you and will never, ever, ever leave you or forsake you. Together, we’ll get through this. And you know what? I know thousands of others who will link up with you too.”

Now, what was once a weak link – is powerful indeed! Not in our might – but in HIS might (Eph. 6:10).

When we feel hurt or weak, ask Him to personally be your *parakletos*, for John says Jesus is our Parakletos, the word for “Advocate” in 1 John 2:1. Ask Him in heartfelt prayer to come alongside. Then you and Messiah now make up that space that used to be just your own broken, shipwrecked life. He comes alongside you and now together, you are raised in Him and with Him to sit in heavenly places. (I’ve been voicing what many scriptures say, in these last 20 sentences or so, and I trust many of you recognize that.)

He linked up with us – and now we can be as strong as He is, if we stay linked up with Him. The rest of the children of Yahweh see this, and they link up with you too. Now, how strong is that once-weak link? Turn now to a verse some of you were probably thinking of as I said those last 2 minutes or so – Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. I’m going to read this one from the New Living Translation.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

9 Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. 10 If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. 11 Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? 12 A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.

Who’s a weak link whom you can think of? Pray for them – and then call them. Even just to say “hello.” Sometimes people are moved by just the fact that somehow you thought of them. It doesn’t take much sometimes. We all like to validation.

But think of ways where you can be like that strong link coming down to the weak link and essentially saying, “Let’s get through this together. I’ll never leave you nor forsake you” – just like

Father says to us! Sometimes just knowing people care enough to have connected with you again by email, phone or letter is enough to get you revved up again.

I almost always regret it when I don't make a stronger effort to be there in times of duress, times of stress, time of sadness in a person's life. Take the time to send a condolence card with a personal note. Take the time to celebrate with someone's joy or mourn with those who mourn – in whatever way you can. And sometimes, hop on the plane and be there – when it's a serious crisis. You'll never regret spending the money. However, you might regret not being a parakletos when they were praying for some help.

But beware! **The best opportunities to be a wonderful parakletos almost never come at a convenient time.** The crisis doesn't check with your calendar first to see if this is the best time for you, so you can drop everything like my friend did – and just go. No, these crises just come up suddenly, with no warning, no time to schedule it. I've certainly blown a lot of those times because I thought I had to work. Or it cost too much money in down time or air fare.

Some of my biggest regrets are *not* so much the things I wish I *hadn't* done (though there are a lot of those too) – but I regret more of the things I wish I *could have* done, but didn't.

Another big point: the biggest opportunities to be a parakletos – a person who comes alongside – are staring us in the face.

These are times we need to forgive our husband, our wife – and though you're mad at her, you've had a fight -- your spirit tells you she's hurting. She needs your assurance of love and that you're going to protect her from any more hurt. So you swallow your pride, you go to her in her pain and assure her of your love. In that moment, you are being a parakletos ship to your spouse.

Wives, there are times you need to be *parakletos* to your husband. Ask Father to open your eyes-- and your heart – to those times. If he's not doing so well in his earnings, or he can't find a job, or provide as other men seem to be able to – he's likely needing some reassurance that to you, he's still your hero, he still has your love and respect, he still is giving you everything you need. We men may act tough on the outside, but I know I feel a heavy burden providing for my family and even extended family at times.

There are times when husband and wife need to assure each other if they just can't seem to provide the emotional or even sexual expectations, for each other, for various reasons. As we get older, or as we experience some side effects of medications, or hormonal changes and menopause – many find it more challenging to be as effective in these areas as they were in their 20's. In those times, the opportunity to be a *parakletos* is right there staring you in the eye: the love of your life needs you. Stand by your man. Stand by your woman.

What I'm saying is that some people – including me – can be good parakletos to everyone else, but not to their spouse, or to their son or daughter.

We can be so blind to the ones right next to us who need a strong *parakletos* in their life. Your son in college may be having issues. Could it be your grandson struggling with a bully, or worried about poor grades? Or maybe it's your daughter struggling to cope as a young mom with two toddlers –

and still juggle her many other responsibilities. Sometimes a word or hug or actual help from Mom or Dad is the lifeboat she needs.

The whole point of this sermon is to be more aware of *being someone who comes alongside*. Let the Spirit let you use your life's experiences to just be there.

It took our son's death for me to learn that. My friend was a great parakletos. Now it's my turn to be a parakletos to any human being made in God's image in their moment of need. Open your eyes. The people needing you are all around you. Open your eyes to a son, daughter, wife or husband, grand ma or grandpa, a forgotten uncle or aunt – then look beyond family. It's not convenient. It seldom will be convenient. And indeed, I preach to myself.

One of the big regrets we have in life is not doing more with people while we could have. We didn't know they were going to die. My cousin just a few years younger than me was killed recently in a violent car accident. I was going to meet up with him in Redding and do stuff together – but somehow that never happened. My father died suddenly 20+ years ago – but fortunately I did write him the letter I needed to before he died suddenly.

Don't have regrets. The loving things you would say in their memorial service – say to them now. The things you would write about them later – write to them now. Do you have an aging uncle or aunt who thinks you never think of them? Call him or her. Say "hi." Ask him or her for stories about your family, their growing up years; show some interest while you can. Validate them. Is there a nephew you have out there who is struggling with life's issues? Be the uncle or aunt he needs. Be the *parakletos* and come alongside with support and strength. Be the strong link he/she might need right now.

What am I teaching? Be a gatherer of people and be one who is there in their tough times.

Bring people together. Start with your family, then your extended family – uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, grandparents and cousins. Keep in frequent touch with your Dad and Mom. Grandmas, grandpas who are aging – make them beam as they hear you are thinking of them. Go by and help them, go by and see them.

Next, reach out beyond your flesh and blood family. There may be someone at work, or a neighbor, who could use a Spirit-led person being a parakletos in their life. Open your eyes. Those people are there, waiting for you to share the love of someone led by God's Spirit.

Young people – I mean anyone under 55 here – don't think you can just email, Facebook or "text" your aging parents or grandparents and get by with that. It's not nearly the same to them as a phone call, or hearing your voice or seeing you in person. You might think it's just as good, but trust me: the older generation wants and needs the real thing – not just a Facebook photo or comment. Please hear me on that one. BE a real parakletos – come alongside in person, for real.

At least once in a while take the time to make a real phone call and just chat with Dad or Mom. Emailing all the time just doesn't cut it for some of us. And no – a phone text message is not the same thing to those of us over 55. Many of us don't even know how to text or read a text message and don't want to learn how. And we have no idea what all the shortcuts mean. It takes a while to even *decipher* text the way young folks write them. "Lol", for one. "How r u", b4, and so on... just

irritates some older folks. Not all – but enough – so sometimes just write to them or call them and speak to them like they are a human being and not a computer. Trust me on that.

But I promise you, you will start to grow old too. And when you do, it's nice to have the younger part of the family come alongside and assure you it's OK that you don't always remember names like you used to. It's OK that you're losing your hair, or aren't as tall as you used to be. It's OK that we are all lumpy, saggy and achy – and I'm just talking about my *left* leg! (Chuckle).

Really – this sermon is about being a parakletos, and being one more often. It's about opening our eyes to the wonder of being there, just when it's the most inconvenient, but most needful.

I've already told you about our friends who dropped everything, drove right up to be with us, and stayed with us for 3 days after my son died. He and his wife were true parakletos to us at the time. God bless them for being there, right then, immediately.

This is all training to be the kind of leaders Father wants for His kingdom. Leaders just like His Son – who came to give of himself, to serve – and not be served. Leaders who care for those under their care. Leaders who are learning what Peter teaches us in 1 Pet. 5 – to lead “NOT as lords *over* those entrusted to you, but as examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:3).

May Father's love fill all His children as we practice being a parakletos to one another – someone who comes alongside and stands with those who need help. Being the strong link in their life. Being the 2 or 3 strand rope that can't easily be broken. Being the parakletos ship to someone who has just shipwrecked their life.

May Father bless you, keep you and guard you – as you practice this incredible gift we have to help stand with one another—as we gather one another into the one body of the Messiah.

Until next time, this is your brother Philip Shields in Messiah – who also needs a *parakletos* brother or sister in my life from time to time.

