A Comfort to Me

COLOSSIANS 4:10-11 (BSB) · SMALL-GROUP LESSON · DIGDEEPER.AI

The Big Idea

You're never too far gone to be welcomed back, and never too ordinary to be exactly what a struggling friend needs.

Opening Lines

Three names in a greeting at the end of a prison letter. Most of us skim right past this part. Tonight we're going to slow down and find out who these men were, because their story is our story.

Before You Teach

- Goal: Get the room to see themselves in these three tired men around a chained apostle, and to name one person they can either welcome back or show up for this week. Success is a named person, not a warm feeling.
- If you're short on time, cut: The full Acts 15 backstory of the Paul-Barnabas split. Summarize it in two sentences if time is tight; the split matters only so people feel the weight of 'receive him.'
- Where the moment lives: The moment someone names a coworker or friend out loud and commits to thanking or welcoming them. Not in the history lesson about Aristarchus.
- Your prep: Know the arc of Mark cold: abandoned Paul, caused a split, now trusted, later 'useful to me' in 2 Timothy 4:11. That arc is the whole engine of this lesson.

Run It In Your Setting

The same lesson, sequenced three ways. Pick the one that fits your group and your clock.

CLASSROOM · ~20 PEOPLE · 45 MINUTES

Classroom opening, hands up on who skips the greetings (3 min). Read the passage and lay out Mark's arc — abandoned Paul, caused the split, now trusted (8 min). Teach parēgoria with the medical image (6 min). Questions 1, 2, and 5, using the silence drill on 5 (20 min). Commitments out loud around the room, big idea stated verbatim, spontaneous prayer over named people (8 min). Transformation lives in the out-loud commitment. If short, cut the full Acts 15 detail to two sentences.

SMALL GROUP · ~8 PEOPLE · 60 MINUTES

Small-group opening about who quietly made your week lighter (5 min). Read passage, Mark's arc plus 2 Timothy 4:11 payoff (12 min). Teach parēgoria (6 min). All five discussion questions, working the silence drill hard on 3 and 5 (28 min). Commitments out loud, big idea verbatim, prayer naming their actual people (9 min). Transformation lives in

questions 3 through 5 where they name real people. If short, drop question 4.

COFFEE · 2-3 FRIENDS · 30 MINUTES

Coffee opening with the Mark surprise fact (3 min). Read the passage aloud together (3 min). Tell the Mark arc in your own words and drop the parēgoria image (7 min). Questions 3 and 5 only, and actually wait through the silence (12 min). Each person names one person and one action out loud, restate the big idea, short prayer over those names (5 min). Transformation lives in the two of you naming real people. If short, skip straight to question 5.

Silence

Here's a habit for every lesson you'll ever teach — this week we drill it deliberately: after you ask a real question, stop talking and let the silence do its work. Level 5 is the hard rep. Pick your two heaviest questions tonight (questions 3 and 5 below are built for this) and after each one, count a full ten seconds of silence in your head before you say another word. No rephrasing, no 'anyone?', no rescuing the room with your own answer. Ten seconds feels like a minute when you're up front, and that discomfort is exactly the point. The people who need to answer are usually still forming the thought when nervous teachers bail them out. Let it sit. If you crack before ten, you taught the room that your questions are rhetorical and they never have to work.

Why This Passage Matters

Most people read Colossians 4 the way they read the credits after a movie — names scrolling by, time to get up and leave. But these three names are the gospel in miniature, and a room that sees it will never skim a greeting list again. Mark is here, the man who quit on Paul mid-mission and caused a fight so sharp that two great missionaries went their separate ways. And now Paul is vouching for him: 'If he comes to you, welcome him.' The deserter became the messenger. That fact alone will loosen the grip of shame on somebody in your room who is convinced they've disqualified themselves. Then there's the word Paul uses for what these men were to him — a term borrowed from medicine, the kind of thing that eases a patient's pain. Not grand ministry. Presence. Somebody who wouldn't leave. Your people spend their days wondering if the small, faithful things they do for others even register with God. This passage tells them their ordinary showing-up is Kingdom work. You get to be the one who hands them that. That's a privilege.

Catch the Fire First

Before you stand in front of anyone, do the exercise yourself. Sit down with a pen and name one actual person who has quietly made your life lighter lately — the one who covered for you, or asked how you really were and waited for the answer. Write their name. Then, before you teach this lesson, tell them. Send the text or say the words: 'You've been a real help to me, and I wanted you to know.' Do not teach 'thank a coworker out loud' having not done it. You'll feel the small awkwardness of it, the way it catches in

your throat a little, and that experience is what lets you ask the room to do the same without it sounding like a slogan. Paul said the actual words. So should you, first.

Bring Your Own Story

- A time someone welcomed you back after you'd failed or quit on something — who received you when they had every reason not to.
- A person whose quiet presence eased a hard stretch for you — someone who just wouldn't leave, like Aristarchus.
- A time you almost skipped over someone with a bad reputation and later found out you were wrong about them.
- SAMPLE (polished vs. real): Polished — 'God restores the broken and uses them mightily.' Real — 'I ghosted a ministry team for a year out of embarrassment, and the guy I'd let down texted me: come back, we saved your spot.'
- Guardrail: bring it real, not raw — a story you've made peace with, not one you're still bleeding from up front.

Three Ways to Open

CLASSROOM: "Quick show of hands: who reads the greetings at the end of Paul's letters, and who skips straight past them? Be honest. Tonight the part everyone skips is the whole point."

Start with a shared experience to level the room before content.

SMALL GROUP: "Think of someone who quietly made your week lighter — didn't make a thing of it, just showed up. Hold that person in mind. We'll come back to them."

Open with a personal question that plants the theme before anyone knows it's the theme.

COFFEE: "So there's this guy Mark in the Bible who bailed on Paul and caused a huge falling-out between two apostles. Guess who Paul's now telling a whole church to welcome with open arms?"

Lead with the surprising fact to spark curiosity fast.

Teaching the Word

The word to teach is parēgoria, translated 'comfort' in verse 11. It's the only time it appears in the whole New Testament, and it wasn't a religious word at all — it was a medical term, the kind of thing a doctor would say about something that soothes pain and steadies a suffering patient. Picture a cool cloth on a fevered forehead. Picture a hand on the shoulder of someone lying in a hospital bed. That's what these three men were to a chained, exhausted Paul. Not sermons. Not strategy. Medicine. Now say the line and stop: 'They have been a comfort to me.'

Discussion Questions

1. When you read a list of names at the end of a letter like this, what do you usually do with it?

Coaching note: Easy on-ramp. You want honesty and a little laughter. Everybody skims these; get them to admit it so the payoff lands harder.

If it stalls: Be honest — do you actually read these name lists, or do your eyes just slide past them?

2. Mark once abandoned Paul mid-mission. What do you think it took for Paul to write 'receive him' years later?

Coaching note: Let them speculate — humility, time, evidence of change. Don't correct; gather. Then fill in the 2 Timothy 4:11 ending where Paul calls Mark 'useful.'

If it stalls: Have you ever had to decide whether to give someone a second chance after they let you down? What tipped you either way?

3. Paul calls these three men 'a comfort' using a word for medicine that eases pain. Who has been that kind of medicine to you?

Coaching note: This is a silence question — ask it, then wait a full ten seconds. Resist filling the gap. Someone is deciding whether to name a real person.

If it stalls: Think of one person who showed up for you when things were hard and didn't make a big deal of it. Just their first name.

4. Is there someone with a 'reputation' you've been quietly writing off — someone you'd hesitate to fully receive?

Coaching note: This gets close to the bone. Don't push for names out loud; let people answer inwardly if they need to. Watch faces, not for hands.

If it stalls: Yes or no, no name needed — is there someone you keep at arm's length because of something they did a while back?

5. Paul's ordinary companions were 'Kingdom work' just by staying close. Where might your ordinary faithfulness to someone actually be Kingdom work right now?

Coaching note: The landing question. This is the second silence rep — count ten. You want a concrete person and a concrete act, not a principle.

If it stalls: Name one person you could text this week just to ask how they're really doing. Who comes to mind first?

Questions You May Hear

"Why did Mark abandon Paul, and why was it such a big deal?"

Mark left Paul and Barnabas partway through the first missionary journey and went home to Jerusalem. It mattered so much that when Barnabas wanted to take him again, Paul refused, and the two of them split up over it in Acts 15.

"Who was Aristarchus?"

A believer from Thessalonica who was seized by the rioting mob in Ephesus and later sailed with Paul toward Rome. Paul calls him 'my fellow prisoner' — he simply would not leave Paul's side through danger and imprisonment.

"What does 'the only Jews among my fellow workers' mean?"

It means these three were Jewish believers. Paul is noting, with real tenderness, that these were his only Jewish coworkers still standing with him — a quiet ache, since so few of his own people had believed.

"Is this the same Mark who wrote the Gospel of Mark?"

Yes — John Mark, cousin of Barnabas. The man Paul once judged unreliable was restored to usefulness and gave us the second Gospel. Grace didn't just forgive his failure; it made him fruitful.

For Experienced Leaders

- Replay in your head where your eyes went tonight. Most teachers lock onto the two or three responsive nodders and quietly teach the whole hour to them while the rest of the room turns into scenery. Pick one person outside that group next time and teach toward them on purpose — stand somewhere different, start the discussion on the side you usually ignore.
- Don't over-explain the Acts 15 split. Two sentences of backstory, then let the word 'receive him' do the heavy lifting. The history serves the tenderness, not the other way around.
- When you say 'these men have been a comfort to me,' actually stop. The line only lands if you let the room sit in the silence after it.

Landing the Lesson

Commitments: Before anyone leaves, have each person say out loud one name and one action: the person they'll thank, welcome, or check on, and what they'll actually do. Say the words in the room.

Close by praying out loud over the specific people your room just named — the coworker they'll thank, the one they've been writing off. Don't reach for a written prayer; say their actual words back to God, because naming real people is the whole point of this passage.

If you run out of time: If the room only gets to question 3 and someone's genuinely wrestling with who's been 'medicine' to them, stay there. A real answer to one question beats rushing all five.

Midweek follow-up: Next week, open by asking who actually sent the text or said the words — and what happened. The follow-up is where the commitment becomes a habit.

Free at digdeeper.ai/devotionals/colossians/4-10-11/lesson

Handout

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During the lesson:

- One person who has quietly made your life lighter lately (first name is fine):
- 'Comfort' here is a medical word — something that eases pain. Who has been that kind of medicine to you?
- Someone with a 'reputation' you've been slow to fully welcome — what would receiving them look like this week?
- Where might your ordinary, small faithfulness to a specific person actually be Kingdom work right now?
- The one name and one action you said out loud tonight:

Take-home actions:

- Name a coworker who has helped you and thank them out loud before your day ends — say the actual words: 'You've been a real help, and I wanted you to know.'
- Be the one who receives someone with a rough reputation: sit with them at lunch, include them in the conversation, or hand them a task that says you trust them.
- If a colleague is under pressure, send one message this week asking one specific way you can carry part of the load.

The Kingdom of God runs on ordinary people who show up for one another. Colossians 4:10-11.