

A Comfort to Me

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

The Big Idea

Paul once refused to even travel with Mark, and now Mark is standing next to him in prison being called a fellow worker, because grace is the thing that turns a guy who walked out on you into the guy who shows up, and it's still doing that work today.

Opening Lines

Three names close out this letter, and one of them belongs to a man Paul once fought so hard about that it split him from his best friend. Watch who's suddenly standing next to Paul in prison.

Before You Teach

- Goal: Get the room to see Mark's whole arc — deserter, then the split with Barnabas, then 'if he comes to you, receive him' — and feel that grace does that to real relationships. Aim it at one person each of them has quietly written off.
- If you're short on time, cut: If time runs short, cut the full tour of Aristarchus and Justus and keep the spotlight on Mark; his story is where the transformation lands.
- Where the moment lives: In the moment someone in the room names the friend they've stopped texting and admits Paul once felt the same way about Mark. That's when 'receive him' stops being ancient mail.
- Your prep: Read Acts 15:37-39 and 2 Timothy 4:11 so you can tell Mark's before-and-after from memory without flipping pages. Have one written-off relationship of your own in mind before you walk in.

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 (3 min). Read Colossians 4:10-11 aloud (2 min). Tell Mark's before-and-after from Acts 15 and 2 Timothy 4:11 (7 min). Teach the word 'comfort'/paregoria with the pressed-palm image (5 min). Questions 1-3 together (12 min). Question 4 with a full fifteen-second silence — eyes on the back rows (8 min). Handout text-draft plus out-loud commitments (6 min). Spontaneous closing prayer over their named people (2 min). Transformation lands at question 4. Cut first: the full Aristarchus and Justus tour.

SMALL GROUP · ~8 PEOPLE · 60 MINUTES

Small-group opening round on broken friendships (6 min). Read the passage (2 min). Mark's story in detail — the split, the years, the 'receive him' (9 min). Teach 'comfort' as

pain-relief medicine (6 min). Questions 2 and 3 (13 min). Question 4 with real silence, let people name their Mark aloud if they will (12 min). Question 5 and handout text-draft (8 min). Out-loud commitments and prayer over each named person (4 min). Transformation lives in questions 4-5 where names get spoken. Cut first: question 1.

COFFEE · 2-3 FRIENDS · 30 MINUTES

Coffee opening — the blunt contrast (2 min). Read verses 10-11 off your phone (2 min). Mark's split-then-recommended arc in your own words (6 min). The 'comfort' word, one sentence (2 min). Straight to question 4: who's your Mark, and mean it about your own (10 min). Draft the two-sentence text together right there at the table (6 min). Pray briefly over each other's person (2 min). Transformation is the moment you both admit a real name and draft a real text. Cut first: the word study.

Silence

Silence is a habit for every lesson you'll ever teach — this week we drill it deliberately, and at level 5 we make it harder than just waiting. Remember week 2 you learned to ask a question and shut your mouth; week 7 and 12 and 17 you practiced not rescuing the room. This week the rep is this: after your hardest question — the one about the friend they've written off — count a full fifteen seconds of silence, and while you wait, do NOT lock eyes with your usual responders. That ties directly to this week's craft note. Most teachers unconsciously teach the whole hour to two or three noddors. During your silence this week, deliberately let your eyes rest on someone OUTSIDE that group and wait for them. The silence plus the redirected gaze tells the quiet ones the question is actually theirs to answer.

Why This Passage Matters

This looks like the boring part of the letter — a list of names you'd skim to get to the ending. But Paul buries an earthquake in a handshake. Mark is here. The same Mark who abandoned the mission partway through, whose second chance Paul refused so flatly that he and Barnabas split over it and never traveled together again. Years pass. And now, from a Roman prison, Paul writes ahead to a whole church: if he comes to you, receive him. The man Paul once wouldn't take is now the man Paul recommends. Everyone in your room is carrying a name like that — a person they've quietly filed under 'done.' A sibling, a friend, someone who let them down. This passage tells them the file is not closed in God's economy, because it wasn't closed on Mark. And notice what Paul calls these three men: a comfort. Not his rescue, not his release — his company. The people who just stayed. You get to hand a room the news that the grace which rebuilt Mark is the same grace that reached them, and it hasn't run out. That's a privilege. You're teaching people that no relationship they've buried is beyond the God who raised this one.

Catch the Fire First

Before the room does this, you do it. Sometime this week, sit down and name your own

Mark — the person you've written off, the friendship you let go quiet because they failed you or you failed them. Not a theoretical one, a real face. Then draft the two-sentence text the Apply card describes: name one good thing you remember about them, and ask if they'll meet you. Don't just draft it — send it before you teach. When you stand in front of the room and say 'send the text you've been avoiding,' you'll be talking with the weight of someone who already hit send, and the room can tell the difference in about four seconds.

Bring Your Own Story

- Tell about a friendship that ruptured over something sharp, like Paul and Barnabas, and whether it ever came back.
- Tell about a time someone you'd written off showed back up useful, or a time YOU were the one written off and got received again.
- Tell about a person who was simply a comfort to you in a hard stretch — not a rescuer, just someone who stayed.
- SAMPLE — polished version: 'God restored a broken friendship in my life and taught me the beauty of grace.' Real version: 'I didn't speak to my brother for three years, and the text that ended it was four sentences long and I threw up before I sent it.'
- Guardrail: keep it raw, not raw sewage — one true unresolved edge is enough, don't dump the whole wound on the room.

Three Ways to Open

CLASSROOM: "Three names close out this letter, and one of them belongs to a man Paul once fought so hard about that it split him from his best friend for good. Read verse 10 slowly and watch for the name Mark, then watch what Paul asks the church to do with him: receive him. Now hold that question — how did the man Paul refused become the man Paul recommends?"

Start with a hidden detail so a skippable list becomes a mystery worth solving.

SMALL GROUP: "Quick round, one sentence each: think of a friendship you had that broke and never really healed. You don't have to say who. Just say whether, honestly, you'd want it back. Hold your answer, because Paul is about to show us one of those that came all the way back from a very ugly split."

Open with a shared human experience before touching the text, so the passage lands on real ground.

COFFEE: "There's a guy in this passage that Paul once refused to even be in the same room with. And here he is, standing next to Paul in prison, getting called a fellow worker. I want to show you what happened in between."

Lead with the blunt contrast to hook a distracted friend in one breath.

Teaching the Word

The word to sit on is the Greek *paregoria* — translated 'comfort.' It's a striking word; it's actually a medical term of the era, the root behind our word 'paregoric,' a soothing medicine that eased pain. Paul, chained, waiting on a verdict that could go either way, calls these three men his *paregoria*. Not his cure, not his escape. His pain relief. Do this physically: press your palm flat against a sore spot on your own shoulder and just hold it there — no massage, no fixing, just steady pressure that eases it. That's the word. That's what a person who simply stays does for you when you're in the hard place. Paul didn't get out of prison. He got these men. Now read it back: 'men who have been a comfort to me.' Let it sit in silence.

Discussion Questions

1. When you read a list of names like this at the end of a letter, what's your honest first reaction?

Coaching note: Low bar on purpose — let people admit they skim it. Their honesty here opens them to being surprised by what's buried in it.

If it stalls: Be honest — do you usually read these name-lists, or skip straight to the end? Hands: who skips?

2. What actually happened between Paul and Mark before this, and what does it change to see Mark standing here now?

Coaching note: This is the factual hinge. Fill in Acts 15 briefly if nobody has it, then let the reversal land — refused, then recommended.

If it stalls: Paul once flat-out refused to travel with this man. What word would you use for how Paul must have felt about him back then?

3. Paul calls these three men his 'comfort' — not his rescue. Why do you think he names their presence instead of praying to get out?

Coaching note: Push past the easy answer. Sit here. The point is that God's gift was company, not deliverance, and that reframes what we ask for.

If it stalls: When you're in a hard stretch, be honest — would you rather have the problem gone, or someone who stays with you in it?

4. Who is the Mark in your life — the person you've quietly written off? What actually broke it?

Coaching note: Here's the fifteen-second silence. Let your eyes rest on someone outside your usual responders and wait. Do not rescue it. Nobody has to say the name.

If it stalls: You don't have to say who. Just answer yes or no in your head: is there someone you've stopped reaching out to on purpose?

5. Paul wrote ahead so a whole church would receive Mark. What would it cost you to send the first text to your person this week — and what's really stopping you?

Coaching note: This is the commitment moment. Name that fear of rejection is normal, and that Paul had to swallow his own history first. Move toward the handout action.

If it stalls: If you were going to send two sentences to that person tonight, what's the good thing you'd remember about them out loud?

Questions You May Hear

"What was the fight between Paul and Barnabas about?"

In Acts 15, Barnabas wanted to take Mark on another journey after Mark had abandoned the earlier one. Paul refused so sharply that he and Barnabas parted ways over it — and Barnabas was Mark's cousin, so the family loyalty made it cut even deeper.

"Did the reconciliation with Mark actually last?"

Yes. Years later Paul writes to Timothy, 'Take Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service' (2 Timothy 4:11). The man Paul once refused became the man Paul sent for.

"Why does Paul point out these are his only Jewish coworkers 'of the circumcision'?"

It carries an ache — most of Paul's own people had rejected the gospel, so having a few Jewish believers stand with him was a real comfort. It also quietly shows the promise to Abraham breathing: Jewish workers laboring for a kingdom now flung open to Gentiles.

"Who was Aristarchus?"

A Macedonian from Thessalonica who'd been seized in the riot at Ephesus and later sailed with Paul toward Rome. Paul calls him a 'fellow prisoner' — a man who shared Paul's danger long before he shared his chains.

For Experienced Leaders

- The name-list tempts you to hurry. Slow down on Mark specifically; the reversal only lands if the room first feels how bad the split was.
- When you ask who their 'Mark' is, resist filling the silence with your own second example. One true prompt plus real quiet does more than three examples.
- Watch your feet: if you always drift toward the same corner, physically start this discussion standing on the side of the room you usually ignore. The quiet ones feel it.

Landing the Lesson

Commitments: Go around and have each person say out loud one thing they'll actually do this week: the name of their Mark, or the two-sentence text they'll send, or the coworker they'll sit with. Out loud, not just in their head.

Close by praying out loud over the specific names and texts people just named — the actual Mark someone mentioned, the coworker someone said they'd sit with. Don't reach for a written prayer; hand their own words back to God so the room hears him take them seriously.

If you run out of time: If the room only gets to question 3 or 4 and someone is genuinely wrestling with the friend they've written off, stay there. That's the whole lesson — don't rush to question 5 to feel finished.

Midweek follow-up: Text the group midweek: 'Did you send it? No pressure to reply — just wanted you to know I'm asking.'

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

Handout

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During the lesson:

- In one honest word, my usual reaction to a list of names at the end of a letter is:
- Before this passage, if I described Paul's feelings about Mark in Acts 15, I'd use the word:
- The 'comfort' word Paul uses meant a soothing medicine for pain. A person who has been that kind of pain-relief for me is:
- The Mark in my life — the person I've quietly written off (name it, even just initials):
- Two sentences I could actually text them: one good thing I remember, and one ask to meet —

Take-home actions:

- Send the text you've been avoiding to the person you fell out with — name one good thing you remember about them and ask if they'll meet you for coffee. You can do it before you sleep tonight.
- Find the coworker carrying something heavy — the one everyone avoids because their project is failing — sit with them at lunch, ask one real question, and actually listen to the answer.
- Before you clock out this week, tell one colleague specifically how their steady work has helped you. Name it out loud.

Grace is what turns a deserter into a comfort — and it is still doing that work.