



## “The Art of Encouragement”

### Introduction

Last week we explored the need and availability of encouragement. Given the multiple causes for discouragement in our world, encouragement is a critical component to survival.

Our own thinking causes discouragement.

Words of others cause discouragement.

World events cause discouragement.

Personal limitations and failures cause discouragement.

Personal and family circumstances cause discouragement.

The dictionary defines discouragement as a feeling of having lost hope or confidence. We have all experienced those feelings from time to time. The feelings range from slight to severe; light to heavy. We all need someone or something to en-courage; restore our hope, revitalize our enthusiasm for life, replenish our diminishing strength, renew our perceptions. Last week we explored a key section of Scripture regarding encouragement where the word “encouragement” appears ten times in only five verses. The Greek term variously translated in our English Bibles (urge, beg, comfort, exhort, encourage, advocate, counsel, help, ask) comes from a combination of the verb “to call” and the preposition “beside”.

It communicates the idea of urging or imploring someone to do the right thing.

It was used to describe a pleading for help.

It describes coming along side another with positive words of encouragement.

It describes someone coming along side not just to console but to strengthen.

It references someone sent to advocate on our behalf; like a lawyer.

The noun and verb appear nearly 150 times in the New Testament. God does it. People practice it. God commands the church to practice it toward one another. Jesus does it. It is the central function of the Holy Spirit. Other terms like inspire, motivate or influence capture the sentiment of the term.

I proposed several observations from a letter of Paul to the family of Jesus followers living in Corinth. He urged them to bless God for His encouragement in all our suffering.

- God’s encouragement flows out of God’s nature.
- God’s encouragement addresses ALL our troubles.
- God’s encouragement empowers us to encourage others who face affliction.
- God’s encouragement mirrors our suffering.
- Our encouragement comes because of our connection with Christ.
- God’s encouragement is others centered.
- Encouraging others energizes endurance in others.
- God’s encouragement inspires hope.

Paul blessed God for His encouragement but recognized that God uses people to encourage us. He shared how the presence of Titus brought significant encouragement. I’ll let him tell you.

*When we arrived in Macedonia, there was no rest for us. We faced conflict from every direction, with battles on the outside and fear on the inside. But God, who encourages those who are discouraged, encouraged us by the arrival of Titus. His presence was a joy, but so was the news he brought of the encouragement he received from you. When he told us how much you long to see me, and how sorry you are for what happened, and how loyal you are to me, I was filled with joy! 2 Corinthians 7:5-7*

Paul was encouraged by Titus who was encouraged by the Corinthians expression of love for Paul and now Paul was encouraging the Corinthians by his letter. Feelings of encouragement provide a new sense of courage, inspiration to go on or do the right thing. The act of encouraging as do with a sense of connection with someone who motivates us in a positive direction out of a negative state (discouragement). Encouragement comes due to at least four things. Inspiration, motivation, renewed enthusiasm, positive outlook come from at least four elements.

## **RESOTRATION OF DIVINE PERSEPECTIVE**

A significant aspect of encouragement involves words. In times of difficulty we need God's perspective on life in a broken world. Many times, our discouragement comes from faulty thinking.

"I'm a failure."

"Nobody loves me."

"God is mad at me."

"There is no way out of this."

"Life is over."

These, along with a multitude of other negative "messages", play over and over in our thoughts even to the point of mental paralysis. We need a renewed thinking. Paul told the Romans that we are transformed by the renewing of our thinking." The major source of that renewed perspective flows from the Scriptures.

*For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the **encouragement** of the Scriptures we might have hope. Romans 15:4*

Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to remind the apostles of His teaching. God inspired and recorded all of Scripture to provide necessary perspective on life.

*But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. 2 Peter 1:20-21*

*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17*

Biblical perspective can come from personal study or the counsel of other people who help us understand Bible principles. In times of difficulty, we need divine perspective on the past, present and future. God's encouragement helps us to address things that happened in our past. Renewed perspective aids our struggle with things in the present. Divine perspective assures us of God's continued presence in the future. Divine perspective encourages the soul to endure, repent, move on.

## **UNDERSTANDING DIVINE PURPOSE**

Seemingly senseless events tend to cause discouragement. "What's the point?" The knowledge that there is some point to it all stirs strength and encouragement.

## **REALIZING DIVINE PRESENCE**

God designed us for community. Disconnection from meaningful community brings greater vulnerability to discouragement. The concept of "God with us" encouraged people throughout the Bible. Jesus promised the presence of one just like Him; the Holy Spirit. The description associated with Him is from the same word we have been exploring. Some translated it "The Comforter"; others "The Helper." It is the same word meaning on called alongside.

The very word indicates PRESENCE.

*I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Encourager, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. John 14:16-17*

There were times when Jesus personally appeared to Paul.

*But on the night immediately following (attempts to kill him), the Lord stood at his side and said, "Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also."  
Acts 23:11*

Jesus appeared to Stephen when he was being executed by stoning. Acts recounts many occasions when the Holy Spirit “filled” individuals and groups. Sometimes God directs special people to encourage us. We sometimes refer to such encounters as a “Divine encounter”.

## **SENSING DIVINE PARTNERSHIP**

God ordained a community of people called the church through whom He chooses to accomplish His will regarding the world and individuals. The passage we considered last week clearly indicated that encouragement is fluid. God encourages us in our struggle so that we can encourage others in theirs. I think that people have lost the art of encouragement. It is a central purpose for coming together. Yes, you can worship God anywhere, but God calls us to praise Him together. He calls us to encourage one another. You can't do that in isolation. God never intend us to function in isolation. Even a sinless Adam in a perfect environment needed one to come along side.

*Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."  
Genesis 2:18*

Paul Simon captured the tragedy of isolation.

*A winter's day in a deep and dark December:*

*I am alone, gazing from my window to the streets below*

*On a freshly fallen, silent shroud of snow.*

*I am a rock, I am an island.*

*I've build walls, a fortress deep and mighty,*

*That none may penetrate.*

*I have no need of friendship: friendship causes pain.*

*It's laughter and it's loving I disdain.*

*I am a rock, I am an island.*

*Don't talk of love; well, I've heard the word before;*

*It's sleeping in my memory.*

*It won't disturb the slumber of feelings that have died.*

*If I never loved I never would have cried.*

*I am a rock, I am an island.*

*I have my books and my poetry to protect me;*

*I am shielded in my armor,*

*Hiding safe in my room, safe within my womb.*

*I touch no one and no one touches me.*

*I am a rock, I am an island.*

*And a rock feels no pain;*

*And an island never cries.*

*-Paul Simon*

Relationships can be energizing or excruciating. On the one hand, Paul extoled the wonders of encouraging relationships. On the other hand, Paul exhorted concerning excruciating relationships.

*Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching. 2 Timothy 4:14-15*

Paul and Barnabas enjoyed a fruitful ministry only to suffer later from disagreement.

What does encouragement look like in the community of believers? I want to synthesize the bounty of passages that mention this central aspect of God's family.

**Encouragement is a function of the Holy Spirit for growth**

*So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied. Acts 9:31*

**The Holy Spirit specifically gifts people to encouragement Rom 12:8.**

**Encouragement flows out of the character of God and His Word.**

*For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 15:4-6*

**We gain encouragement from observing healthy relationships.**

*Therefore we are encouraged. And besides our own encouragement, we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. 2 Corinthians 7:13*

*For I have come to have much joy and encouragement in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother. Philemon 1:7*

**Christ's encouragement of us motivates us to encourage others.**

*So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Philippians 2:1-2*

**We pray that God will encourage others as He has encouraged us.**

*Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal encouragement and good hope by grace, encourage and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word. 2 Thess 2:16-17*

**Encouragement is a primary role of pastors.**

*Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. 1 Timothy 4:13*

*I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus...preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and encourage, with complete patience and teaching. 2 Timothy 4:1-2*

**God promises encouragement in sorrow.**

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be encouraged. Matthew 5:4*

**Encouragement strengthens believers to persevere.**

*When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. Acts 14:21-22*

*So when they were sent away, they went down to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. When they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message. Acts 15:30-32*

**The manner of encourage is like a loving father and his children.**

*As you know, like a father with his own children, we encouraged, comforted, and implored each one of you to walk worthy of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ Eph 4:15*

**Encouragement desires to build up others.**

*Encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5:11*

**Encouragement may be corrective in nature.**

*For we hear that there are some among you who walk irresponsibly, not working at all, but interfering with the work of others. Now we command and encourage such people by the Lord Jesus Christ that quietly working, they may eat their own food. Brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. 2 Thessalonians 3:11-13*

**Encouragement is a continual function of community .**

God instructs us to come along side one another to inspire genuine love.

*not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. Hebrews 10:25*

God also instructs us to come along side one another to inspire godly behavior.

*But exhort (encourage) one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Heb3:13*

I love the concept of the fluidity of encouragement in the body. Encouragement flows through the family as blood flows through the body carrying nourishment and strength. We energize one another by both our words and our presence. Our words provide perspective, truth and hope. God uses others to speak truth into our lives.

*For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit... 1 Corinthians 12:8*

The truth of God provides perspective on issues from the past. Truth applies a framework to address present issues. The Holy Spirit promises God's continued involvement in our lives in the future.

There is power in words; power to both heal and hurt. There are words and then there are words empowered by the Holy Spirit.

*Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit. Proverbs 18:21*

*There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Prov 12:18*

*A soothing tongue is a tree of life, but perversion in it crushes the spirit. Proverbs 15:4*

*Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Ephesians 4:29*

*Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down, but a good word makes it glad. Proverbs 12:25*

*A man has joy in an apt answer, and how delightful is a timely word! Proverbs 15:23*

*Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances. Proverbs 25:11*

Our words can provide divine perspective.

Our company provides divine presence.

In times of deep trauma and sorrow, presence can often do what words can't.

We experience encouragement from understanding God's perspective.

We experience encouragement when we understand a purpose behind our struggle.

We experience encouragement from God's presence or the presence of others.

We experience encouragement when we partner with God and others.

We either need encouragement or need to give encouragement. Coming along side of others is the life blood of God's family. Unfortunately, it does not always function that way. What are the characteristics of a good encourager? That will be the subject of next week's message in the Anatomy of an Encourager.