

Encouragement Sermon

8/9/2020

Good morning friends. It is soooo good to be back with you “live”. I thank the Lord that He made it possible for me to still share with you from God’s Word via pre-recorded video and online options, but it’s still way better to see you face to face.

This morning I’d like to begin by telling you about a friend of mine by the name of **Joe**. At first glance, he seems like just an “**average Joe**”. Nothing particularly outstanding about him. And yet, he’s definitely made an impact with his life. Let me tell you just 4 things about him.

1. **Joe’s a very giving man.** He’d give you his shirt off his back if he thought you needed it, and he’s done that and much more many times that I’m aware of and probably more I don’t know of.
2. **Joe tends to believe the best about people.** His reputation is that if someone messes up big time, and others reject him, Joe will take a chance on you and be there for you. **Proverbs 18:24** says: *A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.* That’s Joe. He can be counted on to be there for you.
3. **Joe’s willing to risk his own reputation and safety to stick up for you.** There’s a great example of this early on in Joe’s life when nobody seemed to want to do anything with a certain man. He’d established a pretty bad reputation as a violent man early in life, but he claimed he’d changed. But others didn’t believe him or trust him and wanted nothing to do with him. So, Joe risked his own safety and reputation by meeting with this man and then was able to testify that the man had actually changed.
4. **Joe looks for and sees the potential in people and invests in them.** And then Joe has no problem stepping back and playing second fiddle to them.

We could all use a Joe in our lives. And some of you have one or maybe a couple. I think everyone of you would enjoy Joe. He’s one of my favorite people in the whole Bible. We’re first introduced to him early on in the historical records of the first Christians. Let me read for you the first time we hear about Joe. It’s found in Acts 4 and it says this, *“Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.*

Think about what kind of nicknames you have had. Some were probably pretty complimentary and others not so much. Here we see that from time spent with Joe, the church leaders nicknamed him, **Barnabas**, which we find out means “**son of encouragement**.” And while some of our nicknames are only used for a short period of time, this one, **Barnabas**, is the only name used for Joe the whole rest of the Bible – **28 times**. What a great way to be known throughout history – as an encourager. We could all use more encourager’s in our lives.

In the New Testament there are two Greek words often translated “**encouragement**”.

1. The first is the compound word: **parakletos**
 - a. “**para**” = “close, beside”
 - b. & “**kaleo**” = “to call”

It’s used in a **legal setting** as a **legal assistant** or counsel for the defense, an advocate. It’s also closely related to the term for the **Holy Spirit**, who comes and lives within us and calls out the best in us or recalls to our hearts and minds who we are in Jesus. The Spirit reminds us that we are **loved**, that we are **saved**, that we are **valuable to God**, and that God has an **amazing plan for our lives**. So, it can mean to draw close to someone for the purpose of calling out what you see in that person.

2. The second term often translated as “**encourage**” is the Greek word **paramytheomai**.
 - a. “**para**” = close, beside

- b. *mytheomai* = **soothing speech**. So, put together it's to come alongside someone and minister to them through words of encouragement or comfort. Like when **Mary and Martha's brother**, Lazarus, had died it says "*many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to **comfort** them in the loss of their brother.*" (John 11:19).

God takes encouragement between His children very important. It's not just a good idea. He **commands it**.

1 Thessalonians 4:18 *Therefore **encourage** one another with these words.*

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

Hebrews 3:12-14 *See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13 But **encourage** one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be **hardened by sin's deceitfulness**.*

- How often are we to encourage each other – **daily**
- **Why are we to daily encourage one another** – so we don't become **hardened by sin's deceitfulness**. Encouragement is God's antidote to us falling into a lifestyle of sin.

We see this exact same **antidote to sinning**, through encouragement, later on in Hebrews.

In Hebrews 10:23-27 we read: "*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope **without wavering**, for he who promised is faithful.*" (so how do we do that? We do it through mutual encouragement).

*And let us consider how to **stir up one another to love and good works**, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but **encouraging one another**, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

This word "*stir*" can mean to **stimulate** or **provoke**. It's a very emotionally charged word. In a negative sense it's used elsewhere to describe the **sharp disagreement** that occurred between **Paul and Barnabas** on whether to take **John Mark** with them on the next missionary journey. The disagreement was so strong that they separated and went their own ways. Here's it's instructing us to spend some serious time figuring out how to stir one another up to keep showing love and good works. **How do we do this?**

In a secular sense, **Connie** experienced this at her job this summer. When she went back to work this summer at the clinic, she was placed in the role of greeting patients when they first came into the clinic and asking them questions about their **exposure to Covid**. Part of her job was to **insist** that every patient **wear a mask** if they wanted to go to their appointment. Most had no problem with it, but a few patients put up quite a protest. About the third day, a lady came in and was refusing to put on a mask. Stating, in colorful loud language, how stupid the mask requirement is. But Connie was doing her best to stand her ground and part way through this interchange, Connie looked over and off to the side was her boss, **holding up two thumbs and simply mouthing, "Good job!!"** Connie said, that simple gesture was all the encouragement she needed to stand her ground, both that day and for several weeks. Later, she told her boss what a huge difference that made in her having the confidence to do her job.

It's important to know that people **believe in us** and that we're recognized for the good job we're doing. Because sadly, we're often criticized when we mess up but not recognized when we do a good job.

Pete Dvergsten commented "*it is sometimes harder to remember situations where we were encouraged rather than discouraged. We remember the bad or not so pleasant rather than the good.*" I bet for many of you that's the case. You can probably recall times when you've been criticized but have more difficulty remembering times you've been encouraged.

So, in this passage we're told to take the time to think about ways that you can motivate others to do acts of love and good works. How can we do this?

Some ways to encourage each other:

- I think one way to do that is through your **own example** of doing acts of love and good deeds. I've often been inspired by others of you as I've observed you showing Christ's love in practical ways.

- Another way would be to **catch people in the act** of showing Christ's love and tell them good job. Give them a **two thumbs up**. You could do it verbally or send them a card or a text. Recognize a Christ-like quality in someone else.
Vicki Seifert experienced that: *Positive words that I have remembered for years and years was when a boss, that I really respected, told me I had the **biggest heart** of anyone he knew. With all the discipline I had to do in the department it meant the world to me.* And those words of encouragement occurred 10 years ago, and yet she remembers it like it was yesterday.
- Take the time to **listen** to someone's hurts and joys and life experiences and **ask them reflection questions** to show you're interested in them.
- Safe hugs or fist bumps
- Pray with someone for God to use them for His honor and glory.

Lately we've been seeing way to much of using words to tear one another down. This is not how God intended us to live. He calls us/commands us to use our words to lift one another up – to breathe courage into one another.

Encouragement isn't just intended to make people feel better about themselves. Encouragement is intended to help build one another's faith. The apostle Paul frequently tells other Christians how hearing how great they are doing in their walk with the Lord encourages his own faith. That's a great model for us to follow. Recognize the growth in other people's faith.

I want to encourage you to make encouragement a daily practice and then eventually a discipline. Set a goal to encourage at least one person every day this week. In your sermon outlines I've left room for you to record each day how you did.

I want to end with a great example of someone who has already been practicing it every day. Peggy Gerbeling shared this with me:

Peggy: *I feel the person that has encouraged me the most, the most consistently, the most lovingly is....no surprise here...**GARY!!** He never uses sarcasm or harsh words or the "silent treatment" or anything else negative. He is positive, supportive, and encouraging. For example: when the meal is finished, I can't remember one time when he didn't say "thank you, that was really good". And there have been times it really wasn't all that good! I am so blessed to call him husband!*

Please join me in prayer

Next week we're going to continue to explore this idea of encouragement and we're going to be specifically talking about a concept called '**affirmation**'.

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Describe Joe:

Encouragement means:

- Para = kaleo =
- Para = mytheomai =

In Heb. 3:12-14; 10:23-27 what is *encouragement* keeping us from doing?

Some ways to encourage each other:

- Your own _____
- _____ people in the act
- _____ to someone's hurt, joys and life experiences
- Safe _____ or fist _____
- _____ with them

Encouragement journal:

Monday: I encouraged _____ by _____

Tuesday: I encouraged _____ by _____

Wed: I encouraged _____ by _____

Thursday: I encouraged _____ by _____

Friday: I encouraged _____ by _____

Sat.: I encouraged _____ by _____

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