

Encouragement Desperately Needed !

Sermon by Pastor Don Ginkel

1 Thessalonians 5:11, “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”

Everyone will experience discouragement in their lives. The dictionary defines discouragement as: “A feeling of despair in the face of obstacles, a state of distraught and loss of sense of enthusiasm, drive, or courage, the weakening of confidence, dejection.” First, let’s see where this all started.

Satan’s first attack on mankind was to bring discouragement into the lives of Adam and Eve. He said to Eve: “Do you really think that God wants to keep you away from that tree? Don’t you understand, Eve, that God is narrow in His thinking? He is mean and miserable and wants your life to be restricted without any real joy. So, Eve, go ahead and take a bite and enjoy life!” This was DIScouraging, to find out that she was missing out on so much. She didn’t want to be restricted by God, so she took a bite. She believed a lie, and that is how it began.

The great lie of Satan is supported by an advertising program using the tool of discouragement. Satan gets many believers to come before the camera and say, “Once I was an unbeliever and now I’m a Christian—you can tell by my long face. As you can see, I am miserable. I am carrying the weight of the world around on my shoulders. The corners of my mouth are perpetually turned down. I moan and complain a lot.”

Sometimes the more spiritual you are, the more prone you are to discouragement. I recently talked with one of our fine, dedicated pastors. He is good pastor, very spiritual in his thinking and doing, but, he is discouraged to the extent that he wants to quit the ministry. Why do some pastors leave the ministry? They get discouraged. It’s not because they run across atheists or unbelief in their community. It’s not even the clash with the forces of the world. Many times it is because of the attacks of the people in their own churches. That’s discouraging.

It’s also true that sometimes Christians are discouraged because of other Christians. Often it’s because of other members of their own family. David had that problem. He had a son by the name of Absalom. His own son rose up against him and said terrible things about him. He threw his dad off the throne. That’s discouraging.

The Bible tells about the twelve spies who went into the promised land to see how everything was. They were to come back and give a report to the people. We read in

Numbers 13:31-32a, “Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, **‘We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.’** But the men who had gone up with him said, **‘We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are.’** And they spread among the Israelites **a bad report** about the land they had explored.” After that the Bible says the people became DIScouraged.

Think about your own life. How often do you feel discouraged? You are stopped at a stop light. The driver behind you hits his horn because you didn’t catch the light changing to green fast enough. Your boss has given you a hard time for no good reason. You’ve lost a lot of money in your money market accounts. Encouragement is desperately needed!

I love to get notes. I got a little note from a young man in my first congregation. He said, “I understand pastors get discouraged and want to give up, so I thought I’d write you and say, ‘Hang in there!’” “Hang in there!” Not many words, but it was really neat! Encouragement brings encouragement. The more you get the more you spread it around. Maybe it’s time for you to send a note to someone.

Do you know why a some people don’t come to church? Usually no one encourages them. You know why we lose some church members? No one gets around to encouraging them soon enough. Do you know why a lot of people don’t attend our Sunday morning Bible class? No one encourages them. Do you know why some people never get their problems solved? Because no one gives them any hope that something can be done.

A parent says, “My child is poor at reading because his father is a poor reader.” That’s discouraging, and, furthermore, that’s not even true. That parent needs to receive some encouragement. A woman says, “My house is a mess, because I was raised in a messy house.” Well, it’s discouraging to think that because you were raised in a messy house that you are going to have to keep a messy house the rest of your life. That’s not true. Someone should give that lady some encouragement.

Encouragement is needed. But what is encouragement? The dictionary defines encouragement as:

- The expression of approval and support
- To give courage or confidence; to advise and make it easier for someone to do something
- Giving a boost—the act of giving hope or support to someone
- The act of encouraging; incitement to action or to practice; that which serves to incite, support, promote or advance something in a person’s life

Our text says, “Therefore **encourage one another** and **build each other up** (*the idea here is to build others up so that it will bring comfort; it conveys the thought that this is something they should do habitually*), just as in fact you are doing.” Paul was writing this to some Christians he had led to Christ in the town of Thessalonica. They had become discouraged. Paul said, “Now remember who you are—you are God’s people. You have been chosen by God to live with Him forever. Remember that Jesus is going to come back on the last day. Whether you are alive or dead on that day, you will live with Him in the Father’s house. So, encourage one another with these words.”

As a Christian you must know that you can **be** encouraged and that you can **give** encouragement. It’s tremendously important that you realize that to accomplish this that you realize who and what you are. Listen. God still loves you despite your sins and failures. What encouragement it is to know that you can keep on coming back to Christ again and again confessing your sins to know that He is never going to say, “All right, that’s the last time!” What encouragement it is to know that with the Christian there will never be the ultimatum, “If you do that again, you’re out of the Kingdom!” What a joy to know that you can be lazy, be grouchy, be greedy, be angry, and then find out that God still loves you.

You can bring that very message to anyone, even a grouch. When someone is grouchy or despondent, frustrated or depressed, just go them and say, “God loves you and so do I.” If you have been grouchy and you have heard those words, you know that things changed. You get encouraged. You get hope. You see God’s love again. You see God’s love in people.

William Arthur Ward put it this way:

- Flatter me and I might not believe you
- Criticize me and I might not like you
- Ignore me and I might not forgive you
- Encourage me and I will not forget you

We need to get into the encouraging business. Little by little we are learning that it’s important that we invite people to come to church with us and that we share our faith with people on a day-to-day basis. We also need to be reminded that we are here to encourage people. Many people feel that’s the pastor’s job, but that’s not sensible.

Gary Collins says in his book, *How To Be A People Helper*, that most situations of helping people can be handled very effectively by most Christians. He says, “Even if there were a sufficient number of professional and pastoral counselors to handle the needs of everybody, some people still prefer to discuss their problems with a neighbor

or a friend. Friends are close by, they don't charge fees, and they are often easier to talk to than a stranger who goes by the title, 'Counselor.'"

There is a man in the Bible that many of you don't know much about. His name is Joseph of Cyprus. He was a wealthy businessman and farmer. He was a real man of encouragement. So much did this man develop and demonstrate the ministry of encouragement that the church changed his name. They called him Barnabas, meaning "the son of encouragement."

When we read about him, we see that he left his home in Cyprus and moved to Jerusalem where he had a farm. The church was in trouble. Its back was against the wall. They were financially strapped, and they were very discouraged. We read in Acts 4 where this man Joseph, now called Barnabas, sold his farm and brought all the proceeds and gave them to the apostles. Not only did this help the church but this encouraged many more to do the same thing. So the church of Jesus Christ was greatly helped and encouraged in their time of need.

We read about Barnabas again in Acts 11:23-24, "When Barnabas arrived (in Antioch) and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad, and **encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts**. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and **a great number of people were brought to the Lord.**"

Every time we see the name Barnabas, he is engaged in encouragement. Acts 9:26, "When Saul came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple." Saul had been viciously persecuting Christians. It was difficult to believe that Saul was now a Christian. Now watch Barnabas in Acts 9:27, "But **Barnabas took Paul and brought him to the apostles**. He **told** how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus."

Barnabas speaks up for a man who had a very questionable background. Barnabas took him in. His name was Saul who later had his name changed to Paul. And Paul is considered the greatest of the New Testament apostles. What was the role of Barnabas in the church? It was gigantic. Paul ended up writing much of the New Testament. Barnabas was an encourager. And that's what is needed in our lives today.

Let me ask you simply: Are you an encourager? There are a lot of people today who are down in the dumps, put there by problems of despair, discouragement, and depression. Why not change your name to Barnabas, "the son of encouragement," and encourage others? The simplest form of encouragement is verbal. All of us know how

good it feels to have someone encourage us with words like: “I really believe you can do this and do it well!” Or, “Good for you! You did a great job!” Or, “I’m really impressed with your attitude.”

But sometimes actions are needed to give encouragement. James 2:15-16 talks about this: “Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?” So words sometimes need to be backed up by action, and sometimes actions need to precede our words.

Develop the habit to encourage people in your home, in your neighborhood, at work, and here at church. Make it an intellectual decision to encourage people every day—make it your personal goal to do this. Make it your ministry. Do this every day. Work at it all the time. Choose a specific way to encourage a specific person. At the end of each day examine how you encouraged people and look for instances where you may have failed, but you will do it better tomorrow.

As you do this your perspective on life will change as you begin to lift up the arms of those who are hanging, you shoulder the burdens that they are carrying, you take time to lift the corners of their mouths, and in the process you will see that you will change, too. Then we will change your name. We will call you Barnabas! Amen!