

The Bulletin

Meeks St. Church of Christ

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“Encouragement”

By Steve Harper

Encouragement, by definition, is to *inspire with courage*. It means to *stimulate by assistance, approval, etc.* It is, again, the opposite of **discouragement** and we can hopefully see which state is more preferable to the child of God, a disciple of Jesus Christ. And, we hopefully can see which we should be trying to do for others! Surely there are enough reasons for discouragement in this world without brethren adding to the problem; we need more brethren who are willing to do their part in **encouragement**.

In spiritual matters, encouragement might be heard more often as other terms: *edification* and *exhortation*. And on this, the Scriptures teach us some important points about the place of the necessary edification and exhortation and what we can do to be edifiers and exhorters, rather than those who discourage. As Christians, we are all striving to get to heaven and, while here on earth, do the things that are pleasing to God and abstain from the fleshly desires.

But we also understand that the life of a disciple is not always easy. Sometimes we **will** get discouraged because things are a little harder than we may have first imagined; sometimes we are discouraged by the behavior of our brethren; sometimes we are discouraged by our own inability to live as we desire and we fail to attain our goals; and sometimes we just do not have enough information to be able to give difficult answers. It is then that we need our brethren to do their part in building us up in the faith and giving us the boost we need to continue as we should. But how is this to be done? Let us let the Scriptures tell us!

The writer of Hebrews — writing to the first-century Jewish Christians who had already suffered persecutions and who were contemplating abandoning the faith and making a return to following the Old Law — pointed to the great need of encouragement for those who were soul weary and discouraged by the fight in which they were involved.

To them he wrote, “*Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed*” (Hebrews 12:12 , 13). More than ever, these brethren needed someone to encourage them to hang on and dig in and not abandon the faith by which they would be saved.



There was a *clear* need, and to ignore it would have proved disastrous for those affected. Let us admit that there may be some today who face some difficult hurdles in their spiritual lives and who could use the encouraging words of those who have walked the same path. So, what words do we speak to them?

Point them to the Word of God.

The apostle Paul, as he was about to depart from the Ephesian elders who had met him in Miletus, said, “*So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified*” (Acts 20:32).

After giving them a very serious charge to watch out for the souls of the brethren and to be alert to the “*grievous wolves*” who would soon enter into the flock, he pointed them to the answer for the coming dangers and that which would be the very source of encouragement to fight the good fight: the Word of God!

Today, we have elders who — far too often — pick up the latest best-seller and the writings of popular “Christian” authors [who are not true followers of Christ at all] and give this to their flock as words of encouragement, rather than the Word of God.

Why is this? Do we not trust that the divinely-inspired Word of God is sufficient? Is it that the leadership does not believe that God's Word is “up to date” with our modern society? Has the Bible become irrelevant, at least in the minds of those who lead us? If so, that ought to tell us where the church will be heading in the near future — and it won't be in the direction of heaven!

It is in the word of God that we read story after story of those who have walked the paths of faith and who have suffered greatly for their faith — and who have been crowned with eternal life as a reward.

It is there that we read of faithful men who neared the end of their earthly life but who still looked forward — to the promised reward and of eternal life in heaven with the Savior (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

It is there that we read of those who have unashamedly believed the promises of God and trusted Him enough to obey without question and who were rewarded with the praise of God and, now, the eternal rest (Hebrews 11). When brethren today need encouragement, there could be no greater source than God's Word. Don't overlook the positive influence it may have on those who are weary and heavy-laden, and who seek the rest for their souls.

Remind them they can do it.

When anyone is feeling overwhelmed or feels like they cannot, by themselves, deal with the pressures they face, we should remind them that — as a Christian — they **can** do it. When the apostle Paul was *in prison* because of his faith, he wrote to the brethren *to encourage them* to “*stand fast*” in the faith (Philippians 1:27) and considered even that his own imprisonment was a positive thing (Philippians 1:14). He was right! [Read Philippians 1:13 and then Philippians 4:22; some of the palace guard must have been convinced and converted by Paul while they guarded him!] But in this letter to the Philippian brethren, he could say with all certainty, “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*” (Philippians 4:13). We would do well to remember that, too, and we would do much good if we reminded the ones who are discouraged. What words of encouragement — to hear that we can do all things!

Or is it that we really do not believe those words? Why would we allow someone to dwell in their state of discouragement when we have such potentially-powerful words? Why not speak those words and build them up in the faith instead of letting them wallow in discouragement? If an imprisoned man who faced the possibility of death for his faith can find encouragement in those words, how about you?

Step in and lend a hand. If you remember, part of the definition of encouragement is to stimulate by assistance. In other words, you can encourage someone by simply lending a hand! Remember Elijah, when he felt like “he alone was left” in all Israel? Remember the words of God, how He told Elijah that he was not alone? And what if good old Barnabas [whose name means “son of encouragement”] had never stepped in to speak up on behalf of Saul (Acts 9:26, 27)? Today, when we feel discouraged because we feel like we are overwhelmed with the work of God or just life, in general, it does immeasurable good when someone steps up and says, “Here, let me help you.” Sometimes, all we need to hear is that someone is there and that someone cares.

Will you be that one?

News and Notes: Sick and recovering: Tim Harris Sr, Tim Harris Jr, Chad Harris, Nicky Curtis, Martha Norvell (Mississippi Care), June Lawson (Lisa Busby's Mom), Clois Wright, Debbie Keplinger, Gaddy Hall, Janis Johnson, Daniel Holloway, Tammy Kilgore (Jerry's niece), Betty Hurst, Peggy Harville (cancer) & Delain Doles.

Steve Switcher had surgery this past week.
We are thankful for Maggie and Audrey's recovery from their illnesses.
We are glad that Paul Johnson is feeling better also.
Prayers for Anna Chesteen (Kathryn's sister) for good results from her biopsy.
Good news for Betty Hurst, as her doctor reported that her legs have greatly improved.
Billy Randolph's daughter welcomed a new baby this past Friday!
Jackie Richardson will be having open by-pass surgery in the near future.

A Singing will be held at the Helton Drive church in Florence, AL. (details in the foyer)

Those Who Serve:

Sunday Morning 9:00 A.M. Service:

Opening Prayer: Fred Johnson
Preaching: Brian Meade
Sermon #1: "You Can Prove Anything By The Bible"

Auditorium Bible Class: 9:35am:

Jerry Kennemur
The Book of John (Mike Willis)
Page 73, Question #8

Sunday Morning 10:30 A.M. Service:

Announcements: Russell Briggs
Opening Prayer & Scripture Reading: Lee Busby
Ecclesiastes 3:12-13
Adam Harris
Lord's Table: Russell Briggs
Assisting: Adam Harris & Nathan Meade
Preaching: Brian Meade
Sermon #2: "Some Do's & Don'ts of the Holiday Season"
Closing Prayer: Russell Briggs

Wednesday Evening: 7:00 P.M.

December 19th:

Auditorium Bible Class: Paul Busby
1 & 2 Kings (Mike Willis)
Page 22, Question # 1
Invitation: Adam Harris
Song Leader: Dan Cottrell
Closing Prayer: Brian Meade