

# Encouragement: Manna and Medicine for the Weak and Weary

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from multiple sources)

## Introduction:

- A. Hebrews 10:22-24
- B. We often speak of encouragement and the need to encourage others and to be encouraged by others
  - 1. We speak of assemblies as opportunities to encourage one another
  - 2. We speak of encouraging one another outside of the assemblies: calls, visits, cards, kind words
- C. Examining encouragement:
  - 1. Defining encouragement
  - 2. The need for encouragement
  - 3. How we encourage one another
  - 4. We can become encouragers
  - 5. How to encourage ourselves
  - 6. How to remain encouraged
  - 7. Strategies for maintaining encouragement

## I. DEFINING ENCOURAGEMENT

- A. The scriptures speak of similar concepts: encouragement and edification
- B. Encouragement: "The act of giving courage, or confidence of success; incitement to action or to practice; incentive" (Webster's)
- C. Edification: "A building up, in a moral and religious sense; instruction; improvement and progress of the mind, in knowledge, in morals, or in faith and holiness" (Webster's)
- D. Greek parakaleo: "to address, speak to, (call to, or upon), which may be done in the way of exhortation, entreaty, comfort, instruction, etc.; to admonish, exhort; to beg, entreat, beseech; to strive to appease by entreaty; to console, to encourage and strengthen by consolation, to comfort; to receive consolation, be comforted; to encourage, strengthen; exhorting and comforting and encouraging; to instruct, teach" (Thayer's)
- E. Greek oikodomeo: "to build; to found, establish; to promote growth in Christian wisdom, affection, grace, virtue, holiness, blessedness; to grow in wisdom and piety" (Thayer's)
- F. Encouragement and edification, therefore, surround the idea of instilling courage in one another and building each other up
  - 1. This is often done by word
  - 2. It can involve comfort (physical, emotional, mental, social, etc.) or exhortation (instruction, direction, commissioning, etc.)
  - 3. It is inherently constructive
- G. The Scriptures often speak of these matters
  - 1. Encouragement - parakaleo
    - a. Acts 14:22; 2Cor. 1:4, 7:13; 1Thes. 4:18, 5:14
    - b. Heb. 3:13, 10:25; 1Peter 2:11; Jude 3
  - 2. Edification - oikodomeo
    - a. Acts 9:31; 1Cor. 8:1, 10:23, 14:17; 1Thes. 5:11

## II. THE NEED FOR ENCOURAGEMENT

- A. Encouraging one another and building one another up are commands of God
  - 1. Why does God require us to encourage one another?
- B. Encouragement and edification are required by the nature of Christianity
- C. Christianity is a volunteer religion
  - 1. God does not force or coerce anyone to do anything
  - 2. God calls people to Himself, but does not coerce people to come to Him
    - a. James 4:8
  - 3. While God will sit in judgment on the last day (Acts 17:31), Christians have no authority to force any other Christian to do anything
  - 4. There are no grades in the church; there is no monetary incentive or any other such thing
  - 5. Christians voluntarily take on the call of being God's people and voluntarily do what He asks of them
- D. In short, the types of compulsion that exists in the world in other situations do not exist in the local church
  - 1. If someone does not study for Bible class, it is not as if their grade can be lowered
  - 2. If someone is negligent in their spiritual responsibilities, it is not as if their pay can be docked
  - 3. Occasionally, it becomes necessary to disassociate from someone who persistently acts immorally or teaches error, but that does not force anyone to do anything (1Cor. 5:1-13; Rom. 16:17-18)
- E. Christians serve God out of their own desire and not by any form of force
  - 1. Compulsion, coercion, or other such tactics cannot be used
- F. That is why there is encouragement and edification; that is the way established by God for Christians to work with one another so that all may be found pleasing to God
  - 1. If someone does not study for Bible class, we encourage them to do so
  - 2. If someone neglects their spiritual responsibilities, we encourage them to be more faithful
  - 3. If someone is having difficulties, we work to build them up
- G. While some may require strong exhortation and rebuke to good conduct, encouragement is designed to be overwhelmingly positive - Phil. 4:6-9
  - 1. One cannot easily build up by tearing down - Matt. 23:1-4, 13-15
  - 2. Col. 4:6 - We need to have properly seasoned words
  - 3. Yes, sometimes one must take down false structures in order to raise up proper and godly ones, but such things must always be done in the proper spirit of love with the goal of building up in the faith!

## III. HOW WE ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER

- A. Encouragement comes often through joint participation in Christ
  - 1. Being with one another, speaking with one another
  - 2. Getting to know one another and know what each other thinks, feels, believes, and needs

3. Working together, suffering together, going to battle together, and carrying a load together form and build relationships and increases affection for the other.
  - a. A foxhole shared makes a brother for life, paraphrases the German General Liebgott: "Men, it's been a long war; it's been a tough war. You've fought bravely, proudly for your country. You're a special group. You've found in one another a bond that exists only in combat among brothers. You've shared foxholes, held each other in dire moments. You've seen death and suffered together. I'm proud to have served with each and every one of you. You all deserve long and happy lives in peace."
- B. This is easily done in the assembly - Heb. 10:24-25; Acts 14:21-22
  1. Regular times of assembly give us many opportunities to be together
  2. Joint participation in the Lord's Supper, singing, praying
    - a. 1Cor. 10:16-17, 14:16-17; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16
  3. If one is not assembling, he is not able to take advantage of this encouragement
  4. Furthermore, if one is not assembling, he is hindering the rest from receiving encouragement gained from his presence and participation
- C. Encouragement is to be given outside of assemblies as well
  1. 1Peter 4:9; Gal. 6:1-2
  2. Such things cannot be expected to occur if brethren only see each other in the assembly
  3. We can gain much encouragement from each other from social association, home Bible studies, and brethren simply getting together to do work projects together, at the church building or at home
- D. Encouragement can be accomplished in many ways
  1. Discussion, conversation, listening
  2. Just being there and sitting with someone
  3. Sharing in others' lives at different times, both positive and negative
  4. You cannot measure the good effect of simply knowing that someone thought enough of another to take a moment for them
- E. Encouragement is derived from Christians being involved in each other's lives in a positive way; if a Christian is not involved with other Christians, he cannot be the source of encouragement he is commanded to be. God's system of volunteer Christianity breaks down with us - Acts 11:19-24

#### **IV. WE CAN BECOME ENCOURAGERS**

- A. Barnabas was nicknamed by the apostles as the son of encouragement.
  1. Acts 4:36; 1Thes. 5:11, 14; Rom. 15:1-7
- B. How can we get that kind of reputation?
  1. Be close enough in love to our brethren to know when they need it.
    - a. Rom. 12:15
  2. Give them what you wish they would give us under the same circumstances. The golden rule - Matt. 7:12

3. How? 2Cor. 1:4 - With what God gives us. Use what we get from God that encourages us to encourage others - 1Thes. 4:18
4. Phil. 2:1-4 - Realize it isn't about us; it's about service to others

## V. HOW TO ENCOURAGE OURSELVES

- A. "Why should I have to encourage myself?"
  1. What if no one is there to encourage us?
  2. What if our encouragers are inadequate to the task?
  3. What if someone in more serious straits than ourselves in need of encouragement?
  4. How do we lift ourselves so that we can help lift up others?
- B. Be active in the work of the local congregation
  1. Begin immediately
    - a. Even the most humble service can be a source of joy for those who are doing it to please God - Psalm 84:10; John 13:12-17
  2. Offer our services to the elders, teachers, the aged or ill - Isa. 6:8
  3. Look for work needing to be done
    - a. The best servant is one who can see things to be done and does them without having to be told every step to take
    - b. Take the initiative
    - c. Most of us are good critics; here is how we can put that ability to good use: Whenever we see something we want to criticize, take it as an opportunity to show (not tell) how it should be done
- C. Start a program of regular daily devotions
  1. Spend a fixed amount of time every day alone with God, engaged in prayer, Bible study, singing praises
  2. It will help to grow visibly, which will in turn give us confidence which will lead to our own encouragement
- D. Participate in an informal Bible study group
  1. Meet weekly with other Christians in an informal setting to study the Bible together
  2. This provides opportunity for mutual sharing and encouragement which leads to even more knowledge and spiritual growth
  3. Participation will lead to confidence; the fellowship will lead to feeling better; the study will lead to edification
- E. Be involved in leading people to Christ
  1. There is nothing that restores the enthusiasm of your early days as a Christian than helping someone else find that joy
  2. Even if we don't do the actual teaching, we can do what Andrew and Philip did, lead a friend to Christ - John 1:40-46
  3. Those involved in leading others to Christ rarely ever stop being built up in Christ themselves
- F. Practice constant self-examination (children and growth charts)
  1. Scriptures call us to examine ourselves relative to Christ - 2Cor. 13:5
  2. Here are some questions we should ask ourselves often:
    - a. Do I have a better Bible knowledge than one year ago?

- b. Am I as interested in Jesus Christ today as when I was baptized?
  - c. Have I helped someone else to become a Christian?
  - d. Am I enjoying life as a child of God?
  - e. Am I improving my life and my disposition?
  - f. Do I set a good example for other Christians?
  - g. Am I growing in such activities as Bible study, prayer, worship?
3. Self-examination is not a comfortable process, but we can't help but be motivated when we see growth

## **VI. HOW TO REMAIN ENCOURAGED**

- A. The danger of a negative, discouraged attitude
  - 1. Of the twelve spies of Israel, ten did not believe they could take the land of Canaan - Num. 13:31
    - a. Their despairing attitude discouraged the rest of Israel - Num. 13:32-14:4, 32:7-9
    - b. It led Israel to complain and rebel against God - Deut. 1:26-28
    - c. It moved them to lose faith in God - Deut. 1:29-33
    - d. It ended with many dying in wilderness - Num. 14:31-32, 36-37
  - 2. When discouragement is allowed to prevail unchecked
    - a. We stop believing in God and in ourselves
    - b. We stop trying to do what God wants us to do
    - c. We discourage those around us
    - d. We fail to reach the goals God has placed before us
- B. When people are encouraged, motivated by a positive spirit
  - 1. Illustrated in the example of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem
    - a. The people had a mind to work - Neh. 4:6
    - b. It helped them overcome ridicule by their opponents - Neh. 4:1-3
    - c. It led to the rebuilding of the walls - Neh. 6:15
  - 2. When we are encouraged
    - a. We continue to believe in God and our ability to serve Him
    - b. We keep trying to do what God wants us to do
    - c. We encourage those around us, and overcome those who would discourage us
    - d. We ultimately reach the goals that God has placed before us
- C. Nehemiah 3 and encouragement found in a work invoice
  - 1. Neh. 3:1 - The priests went to work first (set the example for others)
  - 2. Neh. 3:5, 27 - The Tekoites went to work, even though their leaders did not, and then went on to build a second section
  - 3. Neh. 3:12 - Shallum took his girls to work with him
  - 4. Neh. 3:13 - Hanun built 1/3 of a mile of wall
  - 5. Neh. 3:20 - Baruch worked in an isolated corner of the wall, but made "earnest" (zealous) repairs.

## **VII. STRATEGIES FOR MAINTAINING ENCOURAGEMENT**

- A. Choose to be affirmative
  - 1. We can control our attitudes and moods

- a. We may not be able to control or change our circumstances
    - b. But we can control how we react to them
  - 2. For example we can choose to rejoice when times are hard
    - a. James 1:2-4; Rom. 5:3-4; 2Cor. 4:16-5:1; Phil. 2:17-18
- B. Block out pessimism
  - 1. By avoiding negative self-talk - "I can't do it..." Such as "It's too hard..."
  - 2. By constantly reminding ourselves that:
    - a. We can do what God wants us to do - Phil. 4:13, 2:12-13
    - b. The more efforts we make, the more results we will see - Gal. 6:7-9; 1Tim. 4:15
    - c. Our labor will not be in vain - 1Cor. 15:58
  - 3. By avoiding negative people
    - a. Choose our friends carefully - 1Cor. 15:33
    - b. Avoid people who prefer to whine, complain, and criticize; who clearly have chosen to see harm, evil, and darkness everywhere
  - 4. By surrounding ourselves with active, edifying people
    - a. People who will encourage us to do what is right - Heb. 10:24
    - b. People who refresh our spirits - 1Cor. 16:17-18; Philemon 4-7
    - c. Like Barnabas, the son of encouragement - Acts 4:36; 11:22-24
- C. Live in the present with an eye to the future
  - 1. Live in the present, not the past
    - a. If anyone could have bemoaned his sinful past, it was Paul - 1Tim. 1:12-15
    - b. Paul chose not to dwell on past mistakes (or past successes), but to press on in the future - Phil. 3:12-14
  - 2. Live in the present pressing toward the goal - Phil. 3:12-14
    - a. It was the future glory that enabled him to endure the present trial - 2Cor. 4:17-18
  - 3. This mature spirit (Phil. 3:15) is what helped Paul to maintain a positive attitude even in the most difficult of times - 2Tim. 4:18