

Encouragement and working for change

What Does This Mean?

It is easy to become discouraged and give up trying to change things for the better, but Christians are called to be encouragers so that change does happen. God is called “the God of all encouragement” ([2 Corinthians 1:3-4](#)). The Apostle Paul called on people to encourage each other and build each other up ([1 Thessalonians 5:11](#)). Encouragement means focusing on others and being unselfish in praise. Sometimes, when what people do or what type of person they are goes unnoticed, people who exercise a ministry of encouragement make a point of noticing.

With the news often being about war, disasters, and economic failure, it is easy to give up. Christians are not immune from this feeling, but the eye of faith sees things differently. The decisive battle with evil was won by Jesus through his life, death, and resurrection. Evil is still active, but the outcome is not in doubt: evil does not triumph in the end. The cross is not just about personal faith in Christ and God transforming individuals; it's about hope for the whole world ([Colossians 1:15-20](#); [Romans 8:21-22](#)). Faith brings both hope and realism. We live in a broken world, and things will be difficult, but with God they will not be impossible. This is not “fixing” things; it's about Christians living a communal way of life that says to our world, “It does not have to be like this. Another way is possible.”

Good is stronger than evil; love is stronger than hate; light is stronger than darkness; life is stronger than death. Bishop Desmond Tutu

Hope has two beautiful daughters. Their names are anger and courage; anger at the way things are, and courage to see that they do not remain the way they are. St. Augustine

Discouragement often comes from trying to do things in our own strength and as individuals. Being an agent of change on your own is not the Christian ideal. In the Bible the emphasis is on Christian communities acting in the power of the Holy Spirit ([Acts 4:32-34](#)). Barnabas was an apostle along with Paul, and his name meant “son of encouragement,” and students and teachers can exercise this same ministry of encouragement ([Hebrews 10:24](#)), helping to bring about change.

The group of followers all felt the same way about everything. None of them claimed that their possessions were their own, and they shared everything they had with each other. In a powerful way the apostles told everyone that the Lord Jesus was now alive. God greatly blessed his followers, and no one went in need of anything. (Acts 4:32-34)

What Does This Mean in School?

Encouragement can be something practiced across school life, and being agents of change relates to many subjects, including history, geography, health, civics, information technology, and science.

- Look at change-making communities and their effects on others. The English village of Eyam stopped the plague spreading in Derbyshire in the 17th century. Quakers such as the Cadburys and Rowntrees practiced business in a very different way and affected general business practice.
- Explore small community groups such as those organized by A Rocha (<http://www.arocha.ca/>), which bring about change in local environments.
- Think carefully about the language you use: do students get the impression that things are hopeless and will never change? Or are you overly optimistic? Neither attitude presents a Christian view of reality.
- Look for the cumulative effect in your teaching, by which lots of small things—images, tasks, and resources—can create an overall effect.
- Look for ways in which students can appropriately work for concrete changes in your school or community.
- Use examples of people with vision. What visions of a different type of world did these people have? What informed their vision? Did their vision become reality? How? What was the effect of their vision on others? Was it positive or negative?

Think of a lesson or unit you teach that involves change, perhaps in geography, history, or civics. What overall story does your teaching give on this issue? Do you and your students feel discouraged or realistically encouraged after it? How could you change the

teaching and learning to give a more Christian balance? It might involve changing some resources or how the session is introduced and summed up.



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