

## **BETTER TOGETHER: ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER**

Sermon written by Martha-Jean Fitch

January 8, 2023

**FACEBOOK SENTENCE:** We are called to encourage and build one another up.

**TEXT:** I Thessalonians 5:11, Romans 14:19

Good morning and Happy New Year! It is good to be back together in worship with you today on this second Sunday of 2023. I am so grateful that Steve Jackson was able to bring the message last week – and a fine message it was at that about making decisions and letting God through the Holy Spirit guide us. And choosing to make a new year’s resolution to rejoice always, pray without ceasing and to be thankful in all circumstances! What great words of wisdom.

Today, we begin a new sermon series called “Better Together” – a series that will help us focus on the “one another” passages in the New Testament. We will see how to build our community of faith – caring and loving each other – and serving the Lord together.

So as we begin – I want to start with a quiz to get us going. What are things that are just better together? This will be pretty easy I think you; just shout out the answers as they come up.

What things are better together:

Peanut butter and JELLY  
Bacon, Lettuce and TOMATO  
Hamburger and FRENCH FRIES  
Bread and BUTTER  
Chips and DIP/SALSA  
Socks and SHOES  
Mashed Potatoes and GRAVY  
Salt and PEPPER  
Pen and PAPER  
Macaroni and CHEESE  
Hammer and NAILS  
Hugs and KISSES  
You and ME!

Definitely – God has created us to be together. From the very beginning, God said, “it is not good for us to be alone.” So, God gave us each other. We need each other. We belong to each other. We need community in our lives. God wired us to go through life not as solitary individuals but in community.

And so, God gave us a physical family – the family we are born into and the family we form as we grow into adulthood. And God gave us a spiritual family – your brothers and sisters in Christ. Your physical family eventually moves apart – and eventually dies. But your

spiritual family, God's church, is going to go on forever – into eternity. So, God says – be connected in my family – the church.<sup>1</sup>

Hebrews 10:25 says, *“Let us not give up the habit of meeting together. Instead let us encourage one another.”* We are better together when we meet together regularly – forming a good habit that we do all the time. And we are better together when we are encouraging one another!

Chuck Swindoll, pastor, author and teacher has been in ministry for some 60 years. He is often asked, “What do you think is the biggest need in the church today?” Many people expect his answer to be something like: more prayer, Bible study, church workers, better stewardship. But Swindoll claims it's something different. The greatest need is encouragement. He explains, everyone is hungry for encouragement and affirmation. To help us be more prompt and generous to give it, he says, “Imagine everyone you meet has a big sign hanging around their neck that reads ‘encourage me’.”<sup>2</sup>

The Apostle Paul also saw encouragement as a great need for the health of the churches. The churches often faced difficult times – whether of persecution – or of division and disunity within the church. He taught that the church was to love each other – as Christ loved the church. And then encourage and lift each other up. In his letter to the church at Thessalonica, he tells them to: *“Encourage one another and build each other up.”* (I Thessalonians 5:11) And then in his letter to the church in Rome, he said: *“Let us aim for harmony in the church and try to build each other up.”* (Romans 16:19)

In the Greek language, the word that is used for "encouragement" is *parakaleo* which literally means:

"para" close beside and "kaleo" to call

Thus "encouragement" means someone who is called close beside another for the purpose of helping and caring for that other person ... standing in support of another ... giving strength to another person ... lifting that person up. It is definitely an active word, instead of a passive word. It means to be actively involved in helping another person find the courage that he or she needs to continue on. As one person put it, “to encourage is to put courage into.”

Now here's what's interesting. This word for encouragement *Paraklete* is the same word Jesus uses in John 14:6 to describe the Holy Spirit that He sent to us after He rose back into heaven. He sent us the “*paraklete*” – one who would comfort us and help us. Thus, much as the Holy Spirit, comforts and encourages us – we are to help and encourage others – lifting them up as the Holy Spirit does in our lives.

As we take our eyes off of ourselves – and put them on the Holy Spirit and open our hearts up to be used by Him – He can work through us and actually make a big difference in someone else's life.

Chuck Swindoll put it this way: *“Encouragement is awesome. Think about it. It has the capacity to lift a man's or a woman's shoulders. To breathe fresh air into the fading embers of a smoldering dream. To actually change the course of another human being's day, week, or life.”*<sup>3</sup>

The Apostle Paul and many in the early church knew this kind of encouragement by a man named Barnabas. His name even means, “Son of Encouragement.” And his life and his words actually did change the course of people’s lives.

We first meet Barnabas in Acts 4 when we hear how Barnabas sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet – to help the needy people there in Jerusalem. He literally came alongside them to help lift their burdens.

Next, we hear how Barnabas encouraged an unwelcomed convert. When Paul gave his life to Christ, he immediately became an unwelcome man. His former Jewish friends wanted nothing to do with him and the Christians were very suspicious and afraid of him, thinking it was all a trap. But Barnabas stepped in and welcome and endorsed Paul. He told the disciples of how Paul was a changed man because he had met Jesus on the road to Damascus. He lifted up Paul and helped change the course of his life.

But Paul wasn’t the only one that Barnabas helped. John Mark was a young man that was a helper of Barnabas and Paul on his first missionary journey. But, for some reason, John Mark deserted them before the journey was over. It made Paul upset and he had a sharp disagreement with Barnabas about ever including John Mark again on another journey. He didn’t want to give him a second chance. But Barnabas did. So, Paul and Barnabas parted ways and Barnabas took John Mark and went to minister to Cyprus. He encouraged John Mark and literally changed the course of his life. Mark ended up doing much better and Paul later changed his opinion about Mark and said he would be very helpful in his ministry.

Now think about Barnabas – think about how much the church owes to Barnabas. Because of Barnabas’ encouragement, Paul was able to go out and preach to the Gentiles and write 13 letters of the New Testament. And Mark went on to write the second Gospel. Isn’t it amazing that Barnabas, a man who never wrote a book that made it into the Bible, was able to encourage 2 people who wrote over half of the New Testament. And those words are still encouraging us today!

I believe God is calling to us to be a Barnabas – to be a son and daughter of encouragement. To use our words and our actions to build others up. That might mean just being present. Sometimes the most encouraging thing we can do is just be there to listen – no advice, no solutions, just an understanding ear. So many times there isn’t a lot of things we can do when folks are hurting or grieving or are sick or in the hospital. But one thing we can do is be there. Show up in their home or visit them in them in the hospital or even at a funeral home. Even showing up and sitting with someone in worship – your presence can be an encouragement. The Holy Spirit is our Paraklete who comes along side of us and His presence makes a difference. We too, can parakeleo each other – we can come along side and lend support.

We can also speak words of encouragement. Mark Twain once said, *“I can live for 2 months on a good compliment.”* And another well-known writer, William Arthur Ward, said: *“Flatter me and I may not believe you. Criticize me and I may not like you. Ignore me, and I may not forgive you. Encourage me, and I will not forget you.”*<sup>4</sup>

Ephesians 4:29 says, *“don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.”* Our words can either build up or tear down – it really is our choice. I know I want the words that come out of my mouth to words of blessing – affirming and accepting the other person. Words that can help and inspire.

One of the best ways to encourage someone is to point people to the promises and hope we know in Scripture. To let them know that God loves them and God is there for them and will help them and strengthen them – and that He is always faithful and good and will never abandon them or leave them alone.

What a difference we could make in people's lives – and yes, even our own if we were to truly fulfill this command to “Encourage one another and build each other up.” For if we are reach out to encourage others – we ourselves will be blessed!

There is so much more that could be said about this ministry of encouragement – but let me just end with one inspiring story. It comes from a book by David Jeremiah called *Living with Confidence*. It's a story about Charles Spurgeon, one of the greatest preachers of the 1800's who changed the face of Christianity in England and then around the world:

*As a teenager, Spurgeon was a nonbeliever. He was planning to become a farmer when he decided to learn Latin and Greek instead. He really didn't know where his career was heading. At the school at Newmarket Academy in Cambridge, his life was impacted by one particular individual. No, it wasn't a professor or instructor; neither was it a classmate or friend. Charles Spurgeon had his life changed by the school's cook, an elderly woman named Mary King. She invited him to attend her church one day, and that led to many conversations with her about her faith, eventually setting him on the path to salvation.*

*Here's what that story says to me. If a cook from the kitchen can prepare the path for the greatest preacher of the century, what does that imply God might do through you? We rarely recognize the full extent to which God has used ordinary, available human beings for His greatest purposes. Many millions of people owe Mary King a debt of gratitude because of Spurgeon's contribution to their faith.*

*If such power was in Mary King's hands, it's in yours as well. It's not difficult to encourage, inspire, and edify another human being. You could do it today, using the telephone, a written card, an e-mail, an automobile, your spoken voice – or a strategic pew. What if you made a covenant with every other believer you know concerning this goal? You and your co-conspirators would be determined to give a powerful word of encouragement to at least one soul every time you came to church. And someone just might walk up and encourage you. If you were to do this, God would make a determination of His own. He would begin sending people across your path from every*

*direction – hearts in need of hope, ears in need of edifying words. You can't imagine the joy you would experience simply by being a willing vessel for holy encouragement.<sup>5</sup>*

That's the power of connecting with God and reaching out to connect with those around us. And truly, it makes us "better together!"

Think about it – pray about it. Who can you encourage this day – and tomorrow – and every day?

## **PRAYER**

Grant us courage Holy Spirit. Grant us courage to reach out to those who are hurting and in need of an encouraging word, a gentle hug, an open ear. Empower us to reach out and touch someone who needs to be affirmed and strengthened. Guide us to just the soul who needs to hear and experience that encouragement. Our lives are filled with many blessings. Help us to be a blessing to others. May Your constant and abiding love shine through us to others. In the name of Christ, we pray. AMEN

## **INVITATION**

If you have heard God's words of encouragement in your life and wish to respond by making your commitment of faith or if you are looking for a church home to live out your commitment to Christ you're invited to come forward at this time and we will welcome you and rejoice in your decision.

If you have been moved to rededicate your life to living as an encouraging light of Christ, we invite you to come forward at this time as well and rededicate your life to Christ into the service of Christ people.

Let us all recommit our lives to Christ service as we stand and seem our hymn of commitment.

## **RESOURCES**

<sup>1</sup>Rick Warren, "Why We Need Each Other", 40 Days of Community, October 2004.

<sup>2</sup> <https://theroanokestar.com/2022/08/28/devotional-encourage-one-another/>

<sup>3</sup>Quote by Chuck Swindoll.  
[https://www.azquotes.com/author/14373-Charles\\_R\\_Swindoll/tag/encouragement](https://www.azquotes.com/author/14373-Charles_R_Swindoll/tag/encouragement)

<sup>4</sup>Quotes from David Owens' sermon, "Encourage One Another", Nov. 3, 2009.  
[www.sermoncentral.com](http://www.sermoncentral.com)

<sup>5</sup>David Jeremiah, *Living with Confidence*.