

Hebrews 10:19-23

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[0 : 00] So encouragement, I want to start by defining the terms. What do we mean when we talk about encouraging one another?! And when I speak encouragement, what have we got in mind? I think we've got to dismiss from our thinking that kind of soggy, soppy, feeble idea of encouragement.

So if you read the Bible in an older translation, you might know the word comfort. So let's think about that. What do we use for the word comfort? Some of you children might have a blanket or a blankie. That is a comfort blanket, isn't it? And so you can't get to sleep without a tan or this blanket. And we feel that comforting is something like that. Pulling an arm around someone, saying, there, there, cheer up, don't cry.

Now the Holy Spirit does do that. But the word comfort is stronger than that. It means someone who stands by you. Somebody who stands by you to make you strong. The Latin word comfort is to have a fort put into you, to be brave.

Psalms 23 says, your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Now I doubt when you go home to bed tonight, you children, you would get a rod or a staff with you and snuggle up to that. You wouldn't do that.

[1 : 30] But a rod and a staff, they are an excellent thing to make you strong and brave in a dark valley, in the presence of wild beasts. That's when you need a strapped staff and you need a rod.

And when we think of comfort and encouragement, that is the idea that we need to have.

Encouragement is not necessarily soothing and quieting.

Encouragement isn't necessarily gentle. But it's something inspiring and something inspiring. It's to set us on our feet.

To encourage someone is to fill them with moral energy, determination, enthusiasm.

Encouragement is to make us stronger. Encouragement is to make us braver than we naturally are. And so we read of Judas and Silas, two Christians that went back to the Antioch church in the book of Acts. After the council of Jerusalem.

[2 : 32] And in Acts chapter 15 and verse 32. We're told, we can just get there, Acts 15 verse 32. We're told, Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets.

Encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words. So to encourage is to strengthen. To strengthen people to keep going.

So you think of a marathon. And the marathon runners are encouraged by those who are lining the streets. And they urge them to keep going. Or it can be to be encouraged to get started.

So we have dreams that we have visions and good ideas and intentions of things that we're going to do. But we never get around to actually doing them. Perhaps we're shy. Perhaps we're frightened.

Perhaps we're lazy. And whatever the reasons. We never actually do these things. And an encourager is somebody who gets us going.

[3 : 32] Who goes us into doing what we're reluctant to do. And we encourage one another. Now encouragement comes from God. God is the great encourager.

We'll see something of that tonight. And we'll see something of that over the coming weeks. And many times God encourages us directly. And we'll think about that. But we also need to realise that God often uses means.

And the means that God uses are our fellow believers. So Hebrews 10, 24 which we read. Let us consider how to stir up one another.

How to encourage one another to love and good deeds. So my aim in these three sermons. Is that we would learn to do this more as a church family. That we would go home on each of these three

Sunday evenings.

Saying God wants me to be an encourager. And that's something I must do. And I want to begin tonight with the need for encouraging one another. We need to be convinced as a church family. [4 : 33] That this is something important. Something that's vital. And it's absolutely necessary. Because if we don't believe that. Well we won't do it. We won't give ourselves to it.

It is costly. To be an encourager actually is painful. And sometimes difficult. And it's not an easy thing. So we need to be totally persuaded. Of it's vital importance.

Four reasons. Why we need to encourage one another. So right. First of all. The absence of encouragement. The absence of encouragement. I wonder how would you assess. The psychology. And the self image of Christians you know. I wonder how you do that. Would you say that the average Christian. That you know. Is self confident. Popular. And optimistic. Now unfortunately. Too many Christians are far too self confident. And they're far too pleased with themselves.

[5 : 34] Aren't they? And they're far too happy with themselves. That is one of the great great weaknesses. Of the Christian church today. There is isn't there. A rampant.

Feel good. Therapeutic. Vision. Of Christianity. You can see it on the God channel. So a religion. That has as its target. That you are to make people.

Feel happy about themselves. That we are to encourage. Above everything else. A positive mental attitude. About yourself. So they teach that. The purpose of Christianity.

Is to make you feel good about yourself. Joel O'Steam will say. Well what does God say to us? He says. Love your neighbour. As yourself. In other words.

You can't love your neighbour. Unless you're first loving yourself. And so your first duty. As a Christian. Is to love yourself.

[6 : 30] And then if you love yourself. You will be free to love your neighbour. I will say. That is. Heretical. And that is a perversion.

Of what Jesus is saying. Jesus knows. That we do love ourselves. We love ourselves far too much. Our self love.

Gets us into all sorts of trouble. And Jesus is saying. There is the. You should give yourself to loving your neighbour. He is not commending or encouraging. Self love. He is speaking about.

Sacrificial love of our neighbour. And that whole atmosphere. Is intensely harmful. And it breeds. A generation of Christians. Who are shallow.

And frivolous. And they are taken in. By all sorts of nonsense. And they don't have. Tender consciences. And they don't have.

[7 : 27] A real awareness. Of the awfulness of sin. They have little. Concept. Of the. Majestic. Greatness of God. And it is. Deplorable.

But here is the point. What some Christians have done. Is they have seen that. They spot the error with that. But they have overreacted.

And they have gone to the other extreme. As Christians. Unfortunately. Tend to do. And reformed churches. Like ours. Are no different.

And so you can have churches. Like ours. Which believe the same things as we do. Where there is very little encouragement. Where the great goal.

Is to stop people becoming proud. Where there is far more emphasis. On rebuke and correction. Than loving commendation. And encouragement. And it is grim.

[8 : 23] And it is frowning. And it is negative. And the view is. Well that is the way. That God wants us to be. And sadly some churches. That have wonderful.

Confessions of faith. Are not encouraging places. And in fact. They are discouraging. And so you can probably think of. Young people who grow up.

Terrified. To come to the Lord's table. That they have been told. With such terrifying stress. That you can come unworthily. But they are paralysed.

And they feel. How could I ever go. That cannot be right. We don't want people. Do we. To come flippantly. And frivolously. And thoughtlessly. But neither do we. Want people to go to the other extreme.

And sadly. Many people in churches. Like ours. Are not confident. Vibrant. Energetic people. They are discouraged. And depressed. And they are battered. And scarred. And timid.

[9 : 20] And shy. And fearful. And life is hard. For many people. As it is. You look back. On the last six months. Of. Life.

In this congregation. And. There has been illness. There has been bereavement. And other stress. And there are many Christians.

Who are burdened. And life is difficult. For them. Life is difficult. Living in London. Some of your work situations. Are very. Very discouraging. We have personal weaknesses.

Don't we. In sins. We know. Of the struggle. Of Romans 7. All of us. Have things in our life. That we wrestle with. And we weep over. All of us do. And we cry to God.

Don't we sometimes. Oh wretched man. Oh wretched woman. That I am. I see the good. I know I should do it. I want to do it. But I. I don't do it. And there are sins.

[10 : 19] And in my better moments. I hate them. And I actually despise myself. For doing them. But I. I do them. And I do them again. And we know that's the case.

We live. Don't we. In a very impersonal. Lonely society. Where many of the structures. Of the past. That kind of kept. People together. And provided friends.

Have broken down. And churches. In churches. There are very many lonely people. And people are burdened. And struggling. And lonely.

Battered by the world. And appreciated. And I think. There are many people. Who are dying of thirst. For the water of encouragement. Godly.

Biblical encouragement. Not psychological massaging. But true. Scriptural encouragement. If that analysis is correct.

[11 : 19] I think it is. You can imagine the damage. We're doing. Can't you. The damage we do. By constantly scolding. And rebuking. And pointing out. Flaws. And shortcomings. And failures. Many Christians.

Get the balance wrong. In the other direction. People are longing. To be encouraged. Now some of you. May need rebuking. Some of you. May need to be broken. Before the Lord. And there may be. Something in your life. That God has to show you. And point out to you. And it's very very painful. But there are many others. Who do need to feel. God's arms of love. And strength. Lifting you up. We are not living. In an encouraging world.

We are not living. In encouraging times. And sadly. Many of our churches. Are not encouraging places. The need for encouragement. Let me give you second. The duty of encouragement. Romans chapter 12.

And verse 6. And give us the duty. Of encouragement. Romans chapter 12. Romans chapter 12.

[12 : 20] Romans chapter 12. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us. Let us use them. If prophecy in proportion to our faith.

And then down in verse 8. It says this. It says the one who exalts. In his exhortation. Keep on doing it.

So there is. A particular spiritual gift. A facility. A skill. A talent. For encouraging. For exalting. Cranfield.

In his commentary on Romans. It's very good. Links it with the duties. Of somebody who's been called. To Christian ministry. To teach and so on. He said it is the gift.

Of helping Christians. Live out their obedience. To the gospel. And so in past centuries. There were men in churches. Who were called exhorters.

[13 : 17] Who were encouragers. Because they're tasked to do that. But the New Testament. Also tells us. An encouragement. Is not a gift. That's just given to the few. But it's also a duty.

That's given to every single believer. So the writer of Hebrews. Describes the whole book. Doesn't he? Hebrews 12. 13. 22. As a word of encouragement.

That's what he says. That's what the book of Hebrews is. It's a word of encouragement. And he gives us specific commands. Hebrews chapter 3. And verse 12 and 13. Take care brothers.

Lest there be in any of you. An evil unbelieving heart. Leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another. Encourage one another every day. As long as it calls today. So that none of you right. May be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

That is God's word to you. And to me. That we are to encourage one another. Not occasionally. But daily. Or again. The portion that we read. Hebrews 10. 24 and 25.

[14 : 15] Let us consider. How to stir up one another. To encourage one another. To love and good works. Not neglecting to meet together. As is the habit of some. But encouraging one another.

And all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Encourage one another. And so to encourage one another. Is a Christian duty. Is a Christian command. It's all extra. It's not for the few.

Who are particularly gifted in that regard. There's no hesitation. Or qualification. But we are all to encourage one another. Let me read you a few words from John Brown. Christians are not merely to be concerned about their improvement.

And safety as individuals. But as members of one body. They are to seek to promote. Each other's best interests. They are to attend to each other's wants. Infirmities.

Temptations. And dangers. And to administer suitable assistance. Advice. Caution. Admonition. And consolation. And so think back on the last seven days.

[15:17] Mark yourself out of ten. How would you score? How much encouraging of other Christians have you done? But we are to do it. It is a command.

It's an obligation. It's a duty. I hope none of us would come to the ten commandments and say. I don't fancy nine and ten this week. I don't really think.

Thou shalt not commit adultery. I'm not sure whether I'll care. None of us would be like that. Would we? We'd say it's wrong for me to do that. This is God's law.

Why not to obey it? Well there's another law. And another commandment. And that's to encourage one another daily. To encourage one another is easy to day approaching. It's a Christian duty for you and me.

To be encouragers. Third reason. The pattern of encouragement. One thing is to say. Thou shalt encourage. But the wonderful thing about the Bible.

[16:16] Is it gives us a pattern. Christian duty. Like all. All of God's commandments. Christian accouchement. All of God's commandments.

Are a reflection of the nature of God. God's laws are not arbitrary. God's laws are a reflection of himself.

Of his being. So thou shalt not bear false witness. You shall not lie. Why should you not lie?

Because God is a God of truth. You shall not commit adultery.

Why should you not commit adultery? Because God is a God of faithfulness. God's laws are a reflection of himself. They are not arbitrary. God didn't think I've been having.

Well. Shall I say you shall not commit murder? Shall you commit murder? Or shall you not commit murder? I think I'll say. Thou shalt not commit murder. That's arbitrary isn't it? No.

[17:11] God's laws. Flow out of what he's like. And who he is. God's laws are a shining into the world. Of the character. And the glory of God. And we obey his law.

When we're reflecting him. That's why David can say. You can't see. That statement. Which we find so difficult. Oh how I love your law. Because the law shows us. The character of God. And if that is true.

We should find. We should read that God is an encouraging God. That is not some of the picture.

That is not the picture that some people have of God. Is it? But the God of the Bible.

Is supremely essentially and everywhere. An encouraging God. In fact the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Of God the Holy Spirit. Is summed up as encouragement. So the Greek word.

You might know it. Sometimes we use it in English. That word of paraclete. What is that? It is to encourage. He is the encourager. To exhort. What does the paraclete do?

[18:11] He stands by your side. He puts strength into you. He helps you. And the Holy Spirit is your encourager. And he fills us with strength. And faith. And courage. And he shows us the glory of Christ.

That is the supreme encouragement. Isn't it? That he keeps before us. The promises of God. And the Holy Spirit brings them into our minds. And he fastens them in our hearts. So that by faith we now hold.

On the exceedingly great and precious promises of God. And so we are encouraged. And for every crisis and difficulty we meet in life. There is a promise.

There is a promise. And an assertion of God's power. And grace. And wisdom. And providence to encourage us. And the Holy Spirit seals the promises of God to us. The Holy Spirit assures us of Christ's love.

Of God's love. It's a vast subject. That he bears witness with our spirits. That we are the children of God. And in these.

[19 : 11] And in many, many other ways. The Holy Spirit is the great encourager. And it is the power and fullness of the Spirit. That we need to deliver us from our fears. And our discouragements.

And our introversion. And we must pray for the Spirit. And we must plead for his fuller working in our lives. We must be careful not to grieve him.

Not to quench him. The Spirit encourages us. What's less known. Is God's repeated encouraging. The Father encouraging the Son. So in Isaiah 42 verse 1. God refers to his servant. Whom I uphold.

And time and again. Time and again. In our Lord's earthly ministry. There's critical moments. And you see God the Father. And encouraging God the Son. So on the banks of Jordan. The threshold of Jesus' public ministry.

[20 : 11] He's come out of that kind of quiet life in Nazareth. He's out of the car. Up in the shop. And he is just identified with sinners. He's received baptism from John. And he's about to begin his public ministry.

His saving work. And then something happens. Something happens. Suddenly a voice comes from heaven. And says this is my beloved Son. With whom I'm well pleased.

I try to imagine the feeling in our Lord's mind and heart. As he heard those words. What that must have meant to him. The people who heard it. They must have been influenced by that. Isn't it? But what influence on him?

How kind and fatherly. How. It's almost a proud father. Isn't it? He's a father who is overwhelmed with pleasure. At what his son has just done.

And he tells him so. And he tells others. That is God. Encouraging. It's the same on the Mount of Transfiguration. The shadow of Calvary and the cross is coming ever closer.

[21 : 11] And growing very dark. And the Lord is this young healthy man. It's not so much death that he fears. But as what would proceed and accompany it. And in Matthew 17 verse 5.

You find the same words. This is my beloved son. With whom I'm well pleased. Hear him. And again the father is encouraging the son. Isn't he? Or you feel the dreadful agony of God.

And of Gethsemane. And those mysterious words of 26 verse 38. Here's Jesus speaking. As a man to men. And he says. My soul is exceedingly sorrowful.

Even after death. Stay here and watch with me. So he is asking. Can you imagine that? He's asking Peter and James and John to help him. He's asking them to stay with him. To stay awake.

And to watch with him. There's nothing macho superman about the Lord Jesus is there. You know that kind of Christian isn't it? They've always got a smile on their face. They never have any worries.

[22 : 11] They are the answer to every problem. And they never make any mistakes. There's never any downs. There's never any insecurities. There's never any doubts. No they can rise triumphantly above it all.

They're a pain in the neck aren't they? And yet we see the perfect saviour. We see the sinless holy son of God. Confiding in his friends. And saying to them. I feel so sorrowful. That I feel it's going to kill me.

My friends stay here and watch with me. The son of God needs encouragement. Then we're told in Luke 22.43. Are we that an angel appeared to him from heaven. Strengthened him.

God sent a celestial messenger down into that garden. To encourage him to strengthen his son. And a crisis in his life. A Christian scholar.

Eccentric. John Duncan. Rabbi Dunstan. Said when I get to heaven. I'm looking forward to meeting one of the angels. And it won't be Gabriel. And it won't be Michael. I want to meet the angel that came and strengthened my Lord.

[23 : 15] And you have a picture of a father. Watching over the son. In the way that a parent watches over a toddler.

A picture of him watching his every move. Almost fussing over him. Speaking a vital word. At critical moments. To strengthen and encourage him. Here is the pattern of encouragement. It is the encouraging God.

Who encourages us by his spirit. Who encouraged his son. And when we encourage one another. We are being God like. We are being God like.

Encouragement is needed because there is a lack of it. Because there is a duty. Because God is our pattern. And lastly we need to be encouragers. Because of the power of encouragement.

The power of encouragement. Encouragement. Is an immensely powerful force. I don't know whether you've been to those school assemblies.

[24 : 22] You've heard young children. You've heard young children. You know what it's like. You go to the school assembly. And there is some kind of. Slightly unbearable performance. That goes on. And there is small children that are there.

And it is the most infectious. Encouraging atmosphere. And so the little child stands up. Spots his parents. And smiles nervously. And forgets his lines.

And everybody is willing. The whole room is willing. This child to say the words. And the teacher smiles at him. And whispers the words. You can do it.

You can remember the words. It's an infectious. Powerful atmosphere of love. One of encouragement. And enthusiasm. You can't. You can't. being a football ground or a rugby ground where your team are the enderdogs and you scream encouragement it's a very powerful atmosphere and conversely critical and hurtful words are the opposite aren't they they're so damaging and they can cause pain so severely and for such a long time the teenager who is overweight and teased at school the person with a speech impediment who is made fun of and then we say fixing stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me it's a lie isn't it we know that that is not true words can hurt dreadfully I was at the bedside of a dying man once he was in his 80s he was dying and over 65 years earlier one of his sisters had died from TB in the spine he was playing on a swing she'd fallen off and she'd hurt her spine developed into TB and she'd died this man was in his 80s and he started crying when Mary fell

Annie said I laughed but I didn't laugh I didn't laugh he said 65 years later he'd never forgotten it he'd never forgotten it you hear a mother saying to a child saying you are stupid you stupid child don't ask him we say don't we he did a foolish thing he did a silly thing what you did was wrong but that is different Proverbs 12 verse 18 we're told that there is one who speaks like the piercing of a sword that same script doesn't it it affirms to us the tremendously positive influence of our words Job 4 verse 4 Abathas says to Job your words have upheld me your words have upheld him who was stumbling one translation is your words have kept men on their feet here's a picture of an at the end of his tatter and he is weak and he is staggering and he is stumbling he is about to fall and somebody lets puffs of air out of their mouth and those words infuse such strength and courage that the man or woman does not stumble

[27 : 55] Proverbs 12 verse 25 says anxiety in the heart of man causes depression but a good word makes it dead Proverbs 15 verse 4 a wholesome tongue is a tree of life but perverseness in it breaks the spirit you can break someone's spirit by what you say or you can pour life into them Proverbs 16 verse 24 gracious words are like a honeycomb sweetness to the soul and health to the body Proverbs 18 verse 21 death and life are in the power of the tongue you are made in the image of God and God has given you an awesome utterly awesome power and it has been given to you by your creator and by your redeemer and it is the power of speech

I wonder if you ever really sat down for half an hour and thought of speech what an incredible and awesome thing it is what it can accomplish for good or ill we all experience it I like you can be upset and weakened and discouraged by what someone says to me perhaps I should be perhaps I should have a thicker skin perhaps I should be able to laugh it off but often I find that hard to do but also I can be energized can't I and encouraged and strengthened and filled with enthusiastic eagerness to do more we say it's only words the bible says it is life and death it is health it is keeping people on their feet and it is bringing joy and gladness and transforming people's lives by sensitive compassionate

Christ centred godly speech let me close by an incident from the life of a man called Larry Crab I don't wholeheartedly recommend a lot of his books by any means they're a mixture but he tells a good story he tells us that when he was a teenager very nervously he prayed in public for the first time here's what he says filled less with worship than with nervousness I found my theology becoming confused to the point of heresy I remember thanking the father for hanging on the cross and praising Christ for triumphantly bringing the spirit from the grave stuttering throughout I finally thought of the word amen perhaps the first evidence of the spirit's leading I said it and sat down I recall staring at the floor too embarrassed to look up does this resonate with any of you too embarrassed to look around solemnly vowing never again to pray or speak aloud in front of a group when the service was over

I darted to the door not wishing to encounter an elder who might feel obliged to correct my twisted theology but I wasn't quick enough an older Christian man named Jim Dunbar intercepted me put his arm on my shoulder and cleared his throat to speak I remember thinking to myself here it comes oh well just endure it and get to the car I then listened to this gentleman speak words that I can still repeat today more than 20 years later Larry said there is one thing I want you to know whatever you do for the Lord I'm behind you a thousand percent Kraft says even as I write these words today my eyes are filled with tears those words were life words they had power my resolve to now speak in public again weakened instantly now that Christian man he didn't tell lies he didn't flatter him he didn't say it was a good prayer because it wasn't a good prayer he put his arm around him and said whatever you do for the Lord

I'm behind you a thousand percent and he changed that young man's life and God has given us this ministry of encouraging one another and what a beautiful ministry it is to have that you can send people home this evening thanking God that they met you and that you spoke to them feeling better for it and stronger and more committed to the Lord helping our brothers and sisters in Christ humbly and thankfully this ministry that God has given to us that we may see people changed that we may keep people going that we might get people started doing something that they've never done before that there might be new life in our church that the Holy Spirit would stimulate us and bless us and set us moving because we're not biting each other and devouring each other and not stabbing each other in the back we're not tearing each other down we're not criticizing each other we're not ignoring each other we're not just talking about nonsense but we're encouraging each other and building each other up and may God help us to seek to give ourselves to this ministry!

[33 : 38] to be to be to be