

## “Devoted To Encouragement”

*The command to “encourage” others is found throughout the Bible ...*

“Worry weighs a person down; an **encouraging** word cheers a person up.”  
Proverbs 12:25 (NLT)

“What a joy it is to find just the **right word** for the right occasion!”  
Proverbs 15:23 (TEV)

“The **right word** spoken at the right time  
is as beautiful as gold apples in a silver bowl.”  
Proverbs 25:11 (NCV)

“If we can **encourage** others, we should **encourage** them ...”  
Romans 12:8 (CEV)

“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us,  
so that through endurance and the **encouragement** of the Scriptures we might  
have hope. May the God who gives endurance and **encouragement** give you a  
spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus.”  
Romans 15:4-5 (NIV)

“Such things were written in the Scriptures long ago to teach us. They give us hope  
and **encouragement** as we wait patiently for God's promises. May God, who gives  
this patience and **encouragement**, help you live in complete harmony with each  
other—each with the attitude of Christ Jesus toward the other.”  
Romans 15:4-5 (NLT)

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the merciful Father and the  
God who gives every possible **encouragement**; he supports us in every hardship, so  
that we are able to come to the support of others, in every hardship of theirs because  
of the **encouragement** that we ourselves receive from God. For just as the sufferings  
of Christ overflow into our lives; so too does the **encouragement** we receive through  
Christ. So if we have hardships to undergo, this will contribute to your **encouragement**  
and your salvation; if we receive **encouragement**, this is to gain for you the  
**encouragement** which enables you to bear with perseverance the same sufferings as  
we do. So our hope for you is secure in the knowledge that you share the  
**encouragement** we receive, no less than the sufferings we bear.  
2 Corinthians 1:3-7 (NJB)

“I can speak with the greatest frankness to you;  
and I can speak with the greatest pride about you: in all our hardship,  
I am filled with **encouragement** and overflowing with joy.”  
2 Corinthians 7:4 (NJB)

“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.”

Ephesians 4:29 (NLT)

“So give **encouragement** to each other,  
and keep strengthening one another, as you do already.”

1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NJB)

“To end then, brothers, we wish you joy; try to grow perfect;  
**encourage** one another; have a common mind and live in peace,  
and the God of love and peace will be with you.”

2 Corinthians 13:11 (NJB)

“I am sending him (Tychicus) to you precisely for this purpose,  
to give you news about us and **encourage** you thoroughly.”

Ephesians 6:22 (NJB)

“This much I know for certain, that I shall stay and stand by you all,  
to **encourage** your advance and your joy in the faith ...”

Philippians 1:25 (NJB)

“It is all to bind them together in love and to **encourage** their resolution  
until they are rich in the assurance of their complete understanding  
and have knowledge of the mystery of God ...”

Colossians 2:2 (NJB)

“I am sending him (Tychicus) to you precisely for this purpose:  
to give you news about us and to **encourage** you thoroughly.”

Colossians 4:8 (NJB)

“With such thoughts as these, then, you should **encourage** one another.”

1 Thessalonians 4:18 (NJB)

Being an **encourager** is costly. It takes intentional thought, time, and energy. Most of us live such frantic, self-centered lives that we simply don't notice other people's need for **encouragement**. We're so busy keeping up with our own lives that we don't take time to stop and think how we might touch someone else.

**In 1 Thessalonians 5:11-23, Paul gives many specific examples of how we can encourage others ...**

“**Encourage** each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing. <sup>12</sup> Dear brothers and sisters, honor those who are your leaders in the Lord’s work. They work hard among you and give you spiritual guidance. <sup>13</sup> Show them great respect and wholehearted love because of their work. And live peacefully with each other. <sup>14</sup> Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. **Encourage** those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone. <sup>15</sup> See that no one pays back evil for evil, but always try to do good to each other and to all people. <sup>16</sup> Always be joyful. <sup>17</sup> Never stop praying. <sup>18</sup> Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus. <sup>19</sup> Do not stifle the Holy Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Do not scoff at prophecies, <sup>21</sup> but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good. <sup>22</sup> Stay away from every kind of evil. <sup>23</sup> Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. <sup>24</sup> God will make this happen, for he who calls you is faithful.”

1 Thessalonians 5:11–24 (NLT)

- vs. 11 - Build each other up. Point out to someone a quality you appreciate in him or her.
- vs. 12 - Respect leaders. Look for ways to cooperate.
- vs. 13 - Hold leaders in highest regard. Hold back your next critical comment about those in positions of responsibility. Say “thank you” to your leaders for their efforts.
- vs. 13 - Live in peace. Search for ways to get along with others.
- vs. 14 - Warn the idle. Challenge someone to join you in a project.
- vs. 14 - Encourage the timid. Encourage those who are timid by reminding them of God’s promises.
- vs. 14 - Help the weak. Support those who are weak by loving them and praying for them.
- vs. 14 - Be patient. Think of a situation that tries your patience and plan ahead of time how you can stay calm.
- vs. 15 - Resist revenge. Instead of planning to get even with those who mistreat you, do good to them.
- vs. 16 - Be joyful. Remember that even in the midst of turmoil, God is in control.
- vs. 17 - Pray continually. God is always with you—talk to Him.
- vs. 18 - Give thanks. Make a list of all the gifts God has given you, giving thanks to God for each one.
- vs. 19 - Do not put out the Spirit’s fire. Cooperate with the Spirit.
- vs. 20 - Do not treat prophecies with contempt. Receive God’s word from those who speak for Him.
- vs. 22 - Avoid every kind of evil. Avoid situations where you will be drawn into temptation.
- vs. 23 - Count on God’s constant help. Realize that the Christian life is to be lived not in our own strength but through God’s power.

## Crossroads: Where Pain Intersects With Encouragement

**Encouragement** is not doing for someone what they can do for themselves. It is not removing pain from their lives. It is noticing them, feeling with them, and reminding them of the hope we have in Christ as we persevere in our walk with Him. Life has rough edges that cut deeply. The fabric of our existence is riddled with the dark stain of suffering. Life can be brutally unfair. We all know that. More than anything else we need reassurance from our friends that we're loved, wanted, needed, and appreciated when we've been badly hurt. Only a caring friend can restore our sense of value when we feel most valueless.

But little in life leaves us feeling more inadequate or helpless than when we're faced with the bleak reality of a person we care about caught in the throes of concrete suffering. **What can we do? What can we say that will make a difference? What if we do or say the wrong thing?**

People say, *"I want to help when a friend is hurting, but I freeze up because I don't know how. So I withdraw, and then feel guilty because I know I've let them down."* **Have you had this experience?**

In fact, there is little we can do or say to "fix" another's problems or change the circumstances that have caused their suffering. But there are specific things we can do that will help them survive the pain, process it more effectively, and then find their own path beyond prison walls of anguish ...

### **1. Trust God to lead you.**

We must come to terms with our own limitations before trying to help somebody else. We're not God, nor are we otherwise omnipotent. We're painfully human, limited in wisdom and resources. Unlike Jesus we can't bring the dead back to life, heal disease, or restore broken relationships. But we can *always* do something meaningful.

Pray before reaching out to touch someone in pain. Ask God for two things:

1. That He will comfort the one who is in pain.
2. That He will give you the wisdom, sensitivity, and creativity to be an encourager to them in their time of need.

God takes such prayers very seriously. He loves working in partnership with those who love Him and are willing to serve as a human vehicle for His healing grace. If you must make a mistake, let it be in trying to do too much rather than too little!

Extraordinary people are ordinary people who pray for God's guidance and then pay attention on a consistent basis to the little things in life that God brings to their attention. They don't squander their time or energy on grand but empty gestures; they focus on what they can do—and then do it!

Only people who trust God to lead them are free enough to accept their limitations and still give the most precious gift of all to a suffering friend: *love*.

## 2. Affirm their value by loving them.

Tragedy destroys the neatly arranged pattern of our lives. We feel lost, alone, powerless, and abandoned by God and other people. Like Humpty Dumpty, the meaning of our lives is shattered, broken into a million pieces, and it appears that nobody, including ourselves, can put the broken pieces back together again. When God wants to hug us, He always sends somebody to put *His* arms around us.

That's one way in which people mediate God's grace most dramatically to one another, especially during tough times. But a lot of pain goes unhealed because people He wants to send don't go! *Never* assume that others know you love and care for them. During difficult times silence or vague generalities are almost always experienced as indifference. Be direct and specific. Nothing pulls the broken pieces of a shattered life back together faster than the certain knowledge that we're loved by other people.

## 3. Let them vent.

Whether wounded in body or spirit, hurting people are touchy at times! They're capable of lashing out angrily at people closest to them. Faith in God is stretched to the breaking point. Marriages and other close relationships often crack under the strain of suffering, often because of what somebody said or didn't say at the right moment.

Those who are hurting need to "talk it out" with someone they can trust to *really* hear them. That's one of the important ways in which we sort through the broken rubble of our lives and begin the process of putting the muddled pieces back together again. But we need to talk with somebody who will listen without censoring or lecturing us for outbursts of anger, bitterness, and self-pity.

Grieving is the human response to suffering, and that process follows a predictable, if not serenely peaceful, spiritual sequence. First comes **shock**, that paralyzing experience of bewildered **numbness**, followed by **denial**: "*This can't be happening to me!*" Most people can easily handle a friend's feelings during these states because they're virtually helpless and incoherent. But what follows is chaotic, messy, stressful, exhausting, and emotionally explosive: **anger**, **bitterness**, **resentment**, and **self-pity**. People are capable of saying the most outrageous things when trapped in the quicksand of such destructive feelings. But let them vent. *It's part of the process.*

Angry and bitter feelings are usually disguised in the form of classic why questions

- Why is this happening?
- Why has God allowed this?
- What have I done to deserve this?
- Why is God punishing me so harshly?

These are “trap” questions because ...

1. Rarely is there an obvious, honest answer.
2. Trying to answer the questions only leads to confusion.
3. The questions themselves are cries of pain, not a serious invitation to abstract theological discussion.

People don't need—nor are they likely to hear—a lecture on the meaning of suffering when their hearts are breaking from despair. Even God didn't answer any of Job's questions until Job got some of the anger and self-pity out of his system. Ultimately, God gave Job **Himself**, not answers to impossible riddles. Don't try to answer why questions when friends are grieving. Give them your God-centered, loving self. Listen to them. Accept your limitations and do what you can. Then God can filter His gracious love through you and begin the process of healing.

#### 4. Grieve with them.

There are many mysteries in suffering we cannot understand. But the weight of a heartbreak shared with a loving friend is cut in half. When the burden is shared with many friends, we can cope with almost anything. We never feel more revitalized than when a friend loves us enough to grieve with us in our pain.

#### 5. Share In the suffering of Christ.

When Jesus entered the Garden of Gethsemane on that last night before His suffering on the cross, He desperately needed His friends. *“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me,”* He said to Peter, James, and John (Matthew 26:38). He didn't expect them to “fix” His problem; He knew they could not. What He needed was something they were free to give: their prayers, loving support, a listening ear, their empathy, and their confidence. That could not have changed His circumstances, but He would have found comfort in those circumstances. Instead, they slept.

Let it not be said that we slept when the hidden Christ came to us in the form of a suffering friend in need of our comfort.

**Let's Pray!**