

Encouragement Talk (East Taieri Church 21st September 2025)

S1. Introduction: ‘... encourage one another and build up one another, just as you are also doing.’ (1 Thessalonians 5 v 17).

1. YOU ARE WORTH SOMETHING TO GOD. YOU ARE NOT A DISAPPOINTMENT TO HIM

2. Encouragement is a vital Christian practice involving coming alongside others to build them up with hope, courage and strength. Biblical examples, especially from the Old Testament and the life of Barnabas in the New Testament, illustrate how encouragement supports faith and community resilience amid challenges.

3. Paul asks the Church in Thessalonica, considering all the pressure they had been under, in the context of hope in Jesus and faith for the future to, ‘... **encourage one another and build up one another, just as you are also doing.**’ (1 Thessalonians 5 v 17). Paul assumes they must be doing it already, hence how well they are doing as a body of believers.

4. The writer to of Hebrews (possibly Barnabas or Apollos) says, ‘...**but encourage another day after day...**’ (Hebrews 13 v 14) meaning this needs to be something consistent that we do for each other.’

5. Paul says, ‘**Outdo one another showing honour for each other,**’ (MSG) Romans 12 v 10

What we know from research into the needs of children; children who are affirmed in a ‘good enough,’ (not a perfect home) will be more secure in who they are. The opposite is true. It is the repeated messages said and unsaid during childhood, that form our view of how we see ourselves and how we view the world.

Giving and receiving attention from others is one of the 12 things that has proved good for our health and wellbeing following a longitudinal study (2015) If encouragement is going to be effective, it always comes from who we are, no amount of being told things will change us unless we already believe it about ourselves.

If we have not received much encouragement, we may not know how to receive it or how to give it.

S2. Thinking about encouragement...



Ask people to discuss one of more of these questions for a few minutes.

S3. What is encouragement?

1. **Greek NT-** stimulate to do good things, to come alongside (*paracletos*, the work of the Holy Spirit), to ‘poke’ and ‘comfort’ and ‘build up.’

2. **The English word comes from the French** meaning to instil hope, **courage** and strength.

3. God is in the job of impartation- He imparts to us and we impart to others; 'freely received freely give'.

4. We can give encouragement to others through the words we speak over them and the actions we do for them. Our words are powerful:

- **Prov 18 v 21, 'Words kill, words give life; they're either poison or fruit, you choose.'**(MSG)
- **Prov 16 v 24, 'Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones (NKJV).**
- **James 3 v 6, 'It only takes a spark to set off a forest fire. A careless word or a word placed word out of your mouth can do that, by our words we bless or curse.'** (MSG)
- We can bless or curse with our words. **Curses** can bind people up, prevent them from doing what they were created for. **Blessings** can release people into the life God has for them. **BLESS EACH OTHER**

S4. Examples of encouragers in the Old Testament: Jonathan

David's friend, Jonathan stood by him even in the face of his father, even risking his own life. He consistently supported, interceded and affirmed him as King, reminding him of what God had called him to be and do. He gave up His rights of Kingship for David his friend. The love and affection they shared has never been fully understood. It appears the friendship of encouragement more in favour of Jonathan's encouragement to David.

S5: Examples of encouragers in the Old Testament: Nehemiah an Encourager

When moved to lead the rebuilding of the walls Nehemiah strove hard to connect with God and encourage the people. In **Nehemiah 4 v 4** he reminds the people of the greatness and faithfulness of their God. The discouragement through the opposition to the work came in predictable forms that play out today. This opposition is there to discourage, bring us down, divert us from the task and question why we are bothering. Behind it is the enemy who wants to steal, kill and destroy us and our mission and purpose (**John 10 vs 10-11**). This can come through any channel, even from the people in the Church.

Like with Nehemiah and the people, discouragement can come in the following forms:

- Questioning our right or authority to do or say something, attacking who we are
- Ridicule and mocking
- Direct attack often from within and the unexpected
- Instilling fear

The main counter-reactions to this were:

- Remember who God is
- Remember why you're here
- Silence- you don't need to defend yourself
- Return with love

S6. Barnabas and his life of encouragement

Barnabas, means, 'The Son of Encouragement.' The Encourager: Acts 4v 36

Barnabas is first mentioned here as one of the people who after becoming a Christian sold a piece of land and gave the money to the apostles. He was probably one of the earliest converts either from the day of Pentecost or the conversions which followed. His first name is Joseph a Jewish man from Cyprus from the priestly tribe of Levi. It's obvious he is known in the community as an encourager hence he is given a nickname through what he did. The Greek word here is partly 'paraclesis' meaning to come alongside, 'by the side,' 'exhort, comfort, advocate giving consolation.' The same word to describe the Holy Spirit.

Barnabas' life seems to live out an encouraging lifestyle in his dealings with others. His generosity, advocacy, willing to do the extra mile for people and encouraging others is evident in the accounts which follow. In **Acts 11 v 24**, Barnabas is also described as a '**good man.**'

S7: Barnabas the son of encouragement

The Advocate: Acts 9 vs 27-28 on Paul's behalf

As Paul travels back to Jerusalem after escaping Damascus some of the Church are unsure about what has happened. This is not surprising. Barnabas brings Paul to meet the Apostles who mediate on his behalf testifying to what has been happening. This seems to settle their fears. Paul is later sent to his home town of Tarsus in Asia Minor (now modern day Turkey) for his own safety as the Jews in Jerusalem are planning to kill him.

The Teacher & Encourager: 'The good man,' Acts 11 vs 22-30 to the Church following persecution and inclusion of Paul

The gospel arrives at Antioch from believers who have been scattered, where a thriving Christian community is growing following the persecution, related to Stephen. Barnabas is sent to find out what is happening by the Apostles. He notices the grace of God at work. He sees it with his eyes and his first response is to '**...encourage them in their faith with a resolute heart to remain true to the Lord.**' Barnabas impresses upon them to remain determined, focused in their faith. It says Barnabas does this '**resolutely**' meaning 'determined in character, attitude or ideas.' There was something in his lifestyle and demeanour that gave him this reputation. So then on his own back, as far as we know, he goes to Tarsus and brings Paul back and there with Barnabas they spend time with the Church encouraging them and teaching them. It was at Antioch that people were first called Christians and not just people of the 'way.' Following a prophecy (predictive) of famine in the area they send aid with Barnabas and Saul to the Church in Jerusalem.

The Noticer, Prophet, Teacher, Missionary: Acts 13-14 Teams up with Paul and brings John Mark and God moves through their partnership

Barnabas by this stage has a recognised teaching and prophetic ministry in the Church at Antioch together with Paul and three others. Whilst praying and fasting the Holy Spirit asks for Barnabas and Saul to be set apart for a new work they had been called too. They set off first to Cyprus with John Mark, who Barnabas has brought along, to encourage him to be part of something. He turns back when they leave Cyprus (**13v 13**) and returns to Jerusalem. Both Barnabas and Saul spread the gospel under both a good response and rejection being driven out of town and once Paul is stoned. They see miracles performed and deliverance. They speak in the synagogues first but are later rejected. Both Barnabas and Paul seem to work in partnership with each other. They return to Antioch to report back and spend time there with the disciples (**14 v27-28**), as a way to replenish, receive support.

The Messenger , a man of courage Acts 15 vs 1-35: Instrumental in convincing the inclusion of gentiles to the faith as a result of what he saw; Antioch and with Paul.

The council at Jerusalem discussed the inclusion of the gentiles to the faith. Some of Jewish background began to insist the gentiles are circumcised and obey the law of Moses. Both Paul and Barnabas are invited and on the way share with the Christian's from Samaria all that has been happening. Both Peter and James confirm that the gentiles are indeed coming to faith in Jesus and receive the Holy Spirit. This is what Peter had preached at Pentecost and that it confirms scripture. They all agree sending Silas and Judas both being prophets with Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch, with a letter confirming all this.

S8: Barnabas, what's next?

The Great Separation Acts 15 vs 36-41 Paul seems keen to beginning another adventure starting with the places he and Barnabas had been previously. Barnabas is keen but wants to take John Mark who had got as far as Cyprus last time but had then turned back. Paul is not keen and him and Barnabas have such a 'sharp disagreement' that they separated. Paul takes Silas and starts North through to Syria. Barnabas takes John Mark to Cyprus. Barnabas is prepared to stand by his cousin in front of Paul who from the NT accounts wasn't the easiest person to work with. He was often bombastic, intolerant and spent a lot of time trying to justify himself. We forget Paul was a man- he wasn't perfect.

Barnabas is mentioned once more by Paul, in his letter to the Colossians (**Colossians 4 v10**) as John Mark's cousin. There is no more mention of him in the New Testament record.

He continues to be an important figure in the early Church having an epistle accounted to him. John Mark eventually turns up later in Paul's life as a faithful companion of his (**Philemon 24 and Colossians 4 vs 10**) where he is referred to as the cousin of Barnabas. It is the same John Mark that is with Paul and Peter towards the end of their lives and writes the first gospel. The legacy of the encouragement of Barnabas that led to this event. **We don't know the effect our encouragement may have on a person's life for the future.**

Christian tradition has Barnabas as Bishop of Cyprus, there are still Churches on Cyprus that honour his legacy. Tertullian among others and later scholars claim Barnabas wrote the letter to the Hebrews, given his knowledge of the law as a Levite. He was martyred in Salamis in Cyprus as a result of Jewish opposition to the success of his preaching. He was attributed as the founder of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus. His feast day is June 11th. He is the Patron saint of Cyprus, Milan and Tenerife.

S9: Looking in: What are we known for?

1. A legacy through history- Barnabas is a good example of a person who encouraged and his story is with us today and left in the history he left behind on Cyprus and other places. People saw an encourager and a good man in Barnabas, **what might they see in you?**

2. But Jesus also said we would know God was working in people's lives by the fruit we see in them. What do people see in us as evidence of the Holy Spirit working in and through our lives? It is called having a good reputation.

3. Do we notice what God is doing in other people's lives and encourage them and bring them on board?

4. Do we advocate for others when they are being questioned/challenged?

S10: Looking out: How might we encourage others?

'If believer's flag in zeal and lose heart, we exhort them. If they struggle with a problem and stumble in their walk with God, we build them up. If they face loss and disappointment, we comfort them.' Gerald Sittser from *'The Unfinished Church.'*

Forms of encouragement. Paul writes to Timothy from prison, **2 Timothy 1 v 16-*****'May the Lord show special kindness to Onesiphorus and all his family because he often visited me and encouraged me. He was never ashamed of me because I was in chains.'*** The word for encouragement here is linked to three ideas. They come from the same root word, the Greek verb parakaleo:

1. Give courage in face of doubt and difficulty
2. Exhort/'lift up' for those who have been battered down
3. Counsel/advice as a way to prod to go forward and grow

All three forms of encouragement can be used by God to move us to maturity.

- Sometimes we need to give people courage and inspire them
- Other times, a caring word of comfort is needed
- Other times a word of truth is necessary.

Giving Good strokes. 'Strokes,' Hebrew meaning 'messages,' are mentioned in the **Proverbs 20 v30**. They can be conditional (what we do) and unconditional (who we are). Who we are, are the best strokes, we can receive from God and others. This is because they last, irrespective of what we do. The best encouragement we can give is about who people are, their characters, like Barnabas known as a good man in his heart and it came out in his actions. If we always encourage people for what they do their self-worth can be based in that and when they can't do-what is left?

Be encouraging to all: Jesus asks us to be light and salt in the world. Light brings clarity and salt brings out distinctiveness and difference. How can I be 'light' and 'salt' today in what I do and the contact I have with others?

Being led by the Spirit to encourage: Is there someone the Holy Spirit is leading me to encourage more consistently? Sometimes God prompts us by brings someone our minds, to pray and encourage. ***Sit and wait and see if a person comes to mind.***

What people do with our encouragement is none of our business. We can be reluctant to give encouragement because we think the person might get 'big-headed.' The opposite is more harmful. What people do with our encouragement is not our business and is between them and God, it should never prevent us from encouraging.

S11: Turning it around- Who encourages you?



'Do you have someone in your life who will give you positive biblical encouragement? Is there someone who has the courage to give you truthful counsel when you've veered off the path?'
Rob Bentz, Pastor

Remember encouragement has a prodding meaning to it. This means being in relationship with people who can build you up but also nudge you to do the right thing and even challenge you. This is where good friendships, mentoring and an openness to be challenged and changed are vital ingredients. Equally there is no harm in asking for encouragement, we all need courage at times.

S12. Seeking God's encouragement

- **He is the God of encouragement (Romans 15 v 5).** Real consistent encouragement comes from God alone through His Spirit in and through our lives. He is our source. It is our choice to call upon him for this. **We can go to the wrong places for this and always**

looking for the approval of others. One of the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness, 'If you throw yourself off the angel will save you... *and you will be seen as great and get people's approval.*'

- ***'David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters. But David strengthened himself in the Lord His God'*** (1 Samuel 30 v6).
- **Romans 15 vs 1-5**, Paul reminds us that the stories and legacies of others who have gone before and others we know are there to encourage us to have hope. Through His word and the encouragement of those who have gone before, recorded in the Old Testament are there to inspire us. They are summarised in Hebrews 11, the heroes of faith.
- We can also take encouragement from modern day people and other people through the ages. We have a rich heritage to draw from. David Adam, writing of Cuthbert, a Christian Celtic leader of the 6th century, ***'Cuthbert was known to be an uplifter of the downcast, a comforter of the weary and a strengthener of the weak,'*** from *'Fire of the North: The Life of St Cuthbert'*, page 74.
- **Jesus sought encouragement from his disciples and from God direct**, if Jesus needed this so do we!
- **What Jesus says about us is true and our identity-** That is why Jesus and the NT writers always remind us of ***who we are in God's eyes***. This is the only thing we need. Read Ephesians 1 & 2 to remind who we are in Jesus and what He has done for us.

S13. Conclusion: To ponder

Encouragement is a communal and organic thing. God encourages us to build us up and give us hope from Himself and others. In turn we should do the same for others and look and notice the people who may need that encouragement. In this ideal circular way no-one should ever feel discouraged or outside but included as we operate as the body of God's people building us up and then the people we meet outside too.

Congregational Activity- Write an encouraging word for someone today

S14: Final word: 'You are the glory and the lifter of my head,' Psalm 3 v 3

Prayer

Jesus you are working in my life today. We receive your encouragement afresh today in who we are in you, your beloved children. Show me where I can be an encouragement to others today. May my life demonstrate your love today.