

LESSON 7: ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER

Every member of God's family faces the daily hardships, temptations, trials, and persecutions that are involved in living on earth. In addition to these are the difficulties involved in pressing forward every day through the discouragements involved in trying to do what is right in the Lord's service. Thankfully, being part of God's family means that no one has to feel alone since there are brothers and sisters in Christ who are there to provide encouragement.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-5:11

A true understanding of Jesus's return is something that Christians can use to encourage one another. No matter what challenges Christians face, they can encourage each other with the expectation for when Jesus comes, providing relief to those who are persevering through the afflictions of the world in faithful service to Him and punishing those who do not know God or obey the gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10). The concept of the word "encourage" in this text is Christians calling one another to each other's side to encourage and comfort each other through whatever challenges are faced and urging faithfulness in God's service. So, this encouragement is focused on helping and urging each other to live pleasing to God no matter what happens in life – not about making each other feel good about themselves and the decisions that are being made. Ultimately, this encouragement is found through the word of God (Acts 20:32)!

ACTS 4:32-37

A physical need had developed among the church in Jerusalem that could have resulted in Christians being discouraged. Among the brothers and sisters in Christ who stepped up and went to great lengths to help (and encourage) by relieving their needs was Joseph (2 Corinthians 8:12-15). The apostles

called him "Barnabas" because of the way he encouraged. You can also see Barnabas encouraging elsewhere in Acts, including when he helped the church welcome Saul (Acts 9:26-28), encouraged new Christians in Antioch to remain true to the Lord (Acts 11:19-26), traveled with Paul and encouraged new believers (Acts 14:21-22), and traveled with John Mark after Paul chose not to travel with him (Acts 15:36-41). Likewise, you should consider what the apostles would call you if they could know you. Some are known for less than honorable things among their brothers and sisters ("Grumpy," "Troublemaker," "Sensitive," "Bossy," "Lazy," etc.). Instead, we should aim to be a Barnabas (a "Son of Encouragement")!

ACTS 14:21-22

As Paul and Barnabas traveled on their first missionary journey (Acts 13-14), they encountered many hardships as they preached the gospel due to persecution. Those who became disciples of Jesus in these places also likely dealt with persecutions after Paul and Barnabas left them. So, they returned to those places to strengthen and encourage the Christians to continue in the faith so they would not give up. Similarly, we will need to step into the fires with our brothers and sisters to walk with and encourage them to continue in the faith! Ultimately, no matter what the nature of the challenge is, the encouragement should be that enduring these hardships of life (physical, emotional, financial, relational, spiritual, etc.) is necessary to enter the kingdom of God and experience all the blessings therein. Therefore, you must not give up (Romans 8:16-18; 1 Corinthians 15:57-58; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; Galatians 6:7-10; Revelation 2:8-11)!

HEBREWS 3:7-14

There has always been a pull for God's people to rebel against God. That was true with the Israelites after coming out of Egypt and it is true with Christians after coming out of sin. Satan is active every day through his influences to discourage disciples of Christ from living faithfully to Christ (1 Peter 5:8-9; Ephesians 6:10-13). He is working to

deceive and harden the hearts of Jesus's disciples each day to leave or compromise the faith. In addition to the armor God has provided (Ephesians 6:14-18), one of the main antidotes God has provided to fight this daily discouragement that pulls Christians away from Christ is daily encouragement from their brothers and sisters! This encouragement (which is rooted in Scripture) can come in many forms (e.g. instruction, reminders, correction, listening, etc.). However, having a daily dose of encouragement implies that Christians must be involved in one another's lives every day (not just when the church assembles)! This daily interaction is needed between Christians so they can know how to encourage each other, spot possible sources of discouragement before they become larger issues, and be proactive in strengthening each other.

ROMANS 15:14

This passage introduces another word that should be considered alongside encouragement. The word here translated as "instruct" or "admonish" by several translations contains the idea of applying gentle and positive pressure to urge others to choose what is good and right to bring about positive change. Therefore, some encouragement involves being challenged in those areas where we may be falling short of how God wants us to live, even though we may not like being challenged. Yet, if we desire to please God, this encouragement to correct sin and/or grow in the faith is a necessary part of what we need from our brothers and sisters in Christ (and is even part of the purpose of our singing, Colossians 3:16)!

CONCLUSION

There are many ways that Satan is working to extinguish the faith of Jesus's disciples and discourage us from following Him as we should. We all face these challenges every day in one form or another. So, God's family must be connected and involved in each other's lives to help provide daily encouragement to endure and thrive through the daily discouragements, trials, temptations, hardships, and persecutions!

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

How does the impending reality of Jesus's return provide opportunities for Christians to encourage one another?

What does it mean to "encourage" one another?

How was Barnabas an encourager?

What would other Christians call you if they gave you a name that was based on your behavior?

How can you encourage Christians who experience the hardships and persecutions of life?

How is Satan working to get Christians to leave or compromise the faith?

How do Christians play a part in helping each other remain faithful to the Lord?

How will some encouragement involve challenging and being challenged?

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