

GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Returning to Our Roots

STUDY TWENTY-ONE

Encouragement Served Family Style

Hebrews 10:19–25

The church is not the place for verbal put-downs, sarcastic jabs, and critical comments. It's where people come to be encouraged.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHO is your encourager? The person you call on when your shoulders slump and confidence sags? The friend who listens patiently and speaks a positive word that fills your sails with a fresh wind of hope? Moses had Aaron. Elijah had Elisha. Naomi had Ruth. David had Jonathan. Mary had Elizabeth. Paul had Barnabas. Do you have an encourager?

Our English word *encourage* comes from an Old French word that means “to put courage into.” *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* says it means “to inspire with courage, spirit, or hope: hearten . . . to spur on: stimulate.”¹

We all need someone to inspire us with courage and lift our spirits from time to time—particularly these days. With each passing year, the end-times clock ticks closer to Christ’s return, and the tide against Christians grows stronger. Paul warned us that “in the last days there will be very difficult times” (2 Timothy 3:1). More and more people will scoff at God and “hate what is good” (3:3). The need for encouragers to bolster our faith and steel our hearts is greater now than ever.

Do you have an encourager? Are you an encourager? It goes both ways, you know. Anyone can learn to be an encourager, and in this *Searching the Scriptures* study, God’s Word shows us how.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Reflect on the characteristics of the person who has encouraged you in the past. What qualities did you appreciate? Thank the Lord for this person as you seek to follow in his or her footsteps.

Father, I long to be the kind of person who puts courage into others, who fills others with hope, the one whom others turn to when they thirst for spiritual refreshment. Help me be an encourager. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

When Christians encourage, they do more than flatter—“You’re a winner”—or give a verbal pat on the back—“Just believe in yourself.” We base our encouragement on our relationship with Christ who dwells within us. Our confidence and strength are in Him.

The writer to the Hebrews encouraged suffering Christians to anchor themselves to Christ. He wrote, “Let us run with endurance the race God has set before us” (Hebrews 12:1)—by believing in ourselves? No, we run with endurance . . .

by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. (12:2).

Jesus is our champion! What does Jesus do for us that gives us confidence to persevere and to encourage others to do the same? Let’s find out in Hebrews 10.



Observation: The Biblical Basis for Encouragement

To see what God wants us to see in the Scriptures, sometimes we must read a passage several times. Linger over the words and write down everything you observe.



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Our Source of Encouragement—Hebrews 10:19–20

According to *Hebrews 10:19–20*, what privilege do we have because of “the blood of Jesus” that we wouldn’t have otherwise? (Note: the “curtain into the Most Holy Place” in verse 20 shielded sinful people from God’s holy presence.)

The first word in 10:19 in the New American Standard Bible, *therefore*, indicates the following points build upon the points that just preceded. According to *10:11–18*, what did God’s people have to do in order to come to Him under the old covenant? What did Christ’s “single sacrifice for sins, good for all time” accomplish under the new covenant (10:12)?

Jesus opened for us a new and living way to the Father. We don’t have to go through a system of works. We don’t have to go through a priest. We don’t have to work our way into the presence of God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Our Ministry of Encouragement—Hebrews 10:22–25

“Since we have a great High Priest who rules over God’s house” (Hebrews 10:21), what should we do, according to 10:22–25? In the following spaces, complete the sentences that begin with “Let us.”

Verse 22: “Let us _____.”

Verse 23: “Let us _____.”

Verse 24: “Let us _____.”

Verse 25: “Let us _____.”

How do these commands logically flow together and build on each other?

Encouragement is a relational thing. It is not the responsibility of a gifted few, but of all those of the family of God. It is all the more needed in the last days when those who love Christ are the target of affliction. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Interpretation: The Meaning of Encouragement

All believers follow Christ's crimson carpet into God's presence, coming together under one heavenly roof, the "house of God" (Hebrews 10:21 NASB). God intends His family to come together under one earthly roof, too, at church or in a home to encourage each other. What is encouragement, exactly?

The Greek word for *encourage* in Hebrews 10:25 comes from two words, *para* ("alongside") and *kaleo* ("to call"); encouragement literally means "to call alongside." An encourager is someone who comes alongside us to walk with us and keep us on the road to Christ.

Connection with other believers is a must. Look over [10:21–25](#) again, and write down, specifically, what we do for one another when we encourage.

Battered and bruised from the savage world, we stumble into church. This is the place we come when we need an encouraging word. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Correlation: Right Words Motivated by Love

To add color to your understanding of encouragement, look up these proverbs and write down the wisdom of using the right words.

Proverbs 10:11: _____

10:20–21: _____

12:18: _____

15:4: _____

16:24: _____

18:21: _____

*“Death” words destroy, hurt, and create never-forgotten hateful and humiliating feelings.
“Life” words build up, lift spirits, center on truth, and set free a person in bondage.
Encouragement is a transfusion of strength. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

Encouragement includes using the right words at the right time, but there is more. Jonathan’s friendship with David modeled the necessary relational context for encouragement.

On the run from King Saul, David survived by keeping one step ahead of the tip of the jealous king’s spear. Read the background of David’s friendship with Jonathan in *1 Samuel 18:1–4; 19:1–3*.

According to *23:15–17*, what did Jonathan do to encourage David? How important was the context of their friendship to his encouragement?



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Based on these passages, encouragement is most effective when we say the **right words** with the **right motivation**—love—and we direct our words to the **right target**—the person's fear.

Pastor Chuck Swindoll ties it all together:

The best kind of encouragement . . . is when the person doing the encouraging genuinely loves the other individual and expresses it. That's our friend Jonathan. In such situations, the person needing encouragement honestly admits his fear, which causes a meaningful connection between the two. In that situation, soul meets with soul. And the deepest level of needs begin to be met. *That is our goal . . . effective encouragement served family style!*²



Application: Three Questions to Consider

As we reflect on the principles from our study, three questions rise to the surface.

Whom should I encourage? Ideally, everyone. Realistically, the most natural people to encourage are those with whom you already have a relationship. Effective encouragement takes time, give-and-take, and a willingness to listen and to be involved. Do you know someone who needs to hear life-words motivated by love? Who?



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How can the “levels” of defense be penetrated? No one automatically pulls down his or her defenses in a conversation. It takes patience and a sensitive spirit to break through to a person’s innermost fears. Considering the person(s) above, how can you best get through to him or her?

What essential techniques should you remember? Here are a few tips to consider:

- Talk less so you can feel more.
- Be sensitive to timing, wording, and response.
- Do everything in your power not to judge.
- Use gentleness.
- Don’t telegraph shock when the person unloads his or her story.
- Watch your motive—speak the truth in love.

Some of these techniques may not come naturally for you. On which ones do you most need the Holy Spirit’s help? Can you think of any other techniques you might add?



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If you need encouragement, who can offer you the right words with the right motive directed at your fear? “David found strength in the LORD his God” (1 Samuel 30:6), and perhaps you can too by turning to Him for encouragement now. Express to the Lord your need.

Commit to the Lord all your interactions. Draw near to His throne through Jesus, your great High Priest. Ask the Lord to fill your heart with His love and your mouth with His words of life as you “motivate one another to acts of love and good works” (Hebrews 10:24). Encourage someone today!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, give me the words most needed in the moment for the person who most needs to hear them. Remove my protective layers and help me to love others genuinely. Help me to encourage those I love to hang on when they feel like giving up and to keep their hope alive because of Christ. In His name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 2014), see “encourage.”
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life: Returning to Our Roots* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1986), 384.

