



Sunday Evening Series: On The Pastor's Heart
Pastor Jonathan: Encouragement

Good evening! Last time I began with a question, and I think it's fitting to start our time tonight with the same question:

What if I told you that there was a ministry that everyone in this room could be a part of? A ministry that was so simple that each of us could participate. We didn't need to add it into our budget, we don't need to overcomplicate it - a ministry that would work to build up this church. That would push us forward in our mission of evangelism and discipleship. A ministry that would work against the plans of the devil for this church - would you want to be a part of something like that?

That ministry is the **ministry of encouragement**.

Tonight we're going to take a look at what the bible has to say about the ministry of encouragement, and how that can look for you, and for our church. But before we get too far, let's stop, take a minute, and ask God to speak to us from his word tonight. **Pray with me.**

Why encouragement?

For all the things that I could spend time talking about tonight, why do I think that encouragement is worth our consideration?

- Well, I've already mentioned briefly that **encouragement is a ministry**. It's a ministry. It's a way to build up and edify one another. It's a way to show the love of God to one another. AND believe it or not, it's a great way to grow in your own faith as you strengthen the faith of your brothers and sisters.
- Not only that, but I want to talk about encouragement because **it's something that we all need. The need for encouragement is universal**. Some of us may need more encouragement at times than others, but each of us in this room and in this church in some way needs to be encouraged. And each of us in this room has the ability - through the Spirit - to meet that need for our brothers and sisters.
- Last reason I want to talk about encouragement - The Bible talks about encouragement. In fact, it talks *a lot* about encouragement. The Bible assumes that because we live in a world that is broken, that it is tainted with sin, that is hurtful and difficult and oftentimes *discouraging*, that we need encouragement. And not only is the world outside of us dealing with the effects of sin, our own hearts within us struggle every day with the

hurtful effects of sin. **And one of the primary tools that God uses to encourage us is his word spoken in kindness and in patience and in love from the lips of our brothers and sisters in Christ.**

So I want to spend most of our time tonight just looking at God's word to see how the Bible presents encouragement, and then we're going to talk about how we can grow in this ministry of encouragement to one another.

ENCOURAGEMENT IN THE BIBLE:

Well what does God's word have to teach us about encouragement? I started trying to work through every single passage that dealt with encouragement and I was completely overwhelmed with how often it appears. Then you get past where just the word encouragement is mentioned and look at biblical examples of encouragement and this would have to be about a 6-month course if we were going to unpack all of it. SO, because we've only planned to be here about 45 minutes or so, we're not going to look at every text. We're going to take a look from scripture at **what encouragement is and what it is not.**

First, let's look at what encouragement IS in the scriptures.

The word that is used most often in the NT for "encourage" is also translated as exhort, comfort, or urge.

It appears at least 6 times in Acts, though no doubt the concept is all over that book, which tells me that **the early church was devoted to the ministry of encouragement.**
They were all about it!

Acts 14 we see Paul being stoned for preaching the gospel, then he gets up and goes back to the town and encourages the brothers there.

Acts 15 - Judas and Silas encourage the brothers

Acts 16 - Paul and Silas encourage the brothers after they are released from prison

And my favorite - Acts 27:36 - "Then they were all encouraged and ate some food."

1. So our first truth of what encouragement IS - encouragement is to be a normal ministry of the church. It should be a regular part of our lives together - to speak words of truth and encourage one another.

2. Encouragement is an invisible ministry

It is an invisible ministry. Most of us, when we think of ministry and how we can really get involved and serve the church - we think of things we can do with our hands. Things that have quick and visible results. Encouragement doesn't work like that, but believe me when I say that it is just as important a ministry as anything you can see with your eyes.

The place where encouragement happens isn't outside of us, but inside of us. When we're encouraged, we are encouraged in our heart.

Eph. 6:22 - Paul sends Tychicus to the church "that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts"

A similar passage in **Colossians 4:8** - Paul sends Tychicus again, "I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts."

So encouragement is an invisible ministry, but of course that doesn't mean it's insignificant.

3. Encouragement is rooted in the gospel

Col. 2:1-2 : Paul wants to remind the Colossian church of how much he labor and struggles for their sake, that their **hearts may be encouraged... to reach the full assurance and knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ.**

Encouragement, biblically speaking, is rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ. We encourage one another by either telling them how God is working in you, how you are laboring for the gospel, by telling them how you see God working in them as they believe the gospel, by reminding them of the truth of the gospel, or by urging them to obey the demands of the gospel.

What is the gospel? It's the good news that Jesus has done what we could not. It's the hope that we have life forever with God to look forward to - and that sustains us in this fallen world. **We need to hear this and be encouraged by these words.**

The gospel is that when we were broken and dead, separated from God because of our sin, *God spoke to us the words of life in the gospel of his son.*

So encouragement is rooted in the gospel.

Let me pause here for any questions before we move to what encouragement is NOT.

What is Encouragement Is NOT

- 1. Encouragement is not *just* for the discouraged.**

We just saw how we all need encouragement all the time. Of course, those who are weak and wounded need our encouragement, but so do those who seem to be doing alright. All of us in some way need to be encouraged with the truth of God's word.

Encouragement is for the weak and discouraged, but it is not **just** for the weak and discouraged

1 Thess. 5:14 - "And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all."

So here we see Paul telling the church to encourage those who are fainthearted. Encourage the weak.

Yet, just a few verses earlier, **chapter 5 verses 9-11 - Paul encourages the entire church with the truth of the gospel, and charges them to do the same.** He says God has not destined us for wrath but to obtain salvation through our lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep (dead or alive) we might live with him. *Therefore encourage one another* and build one another up, just as you are doing.

So yes, encouragement is for the fainthearted, but it's also for the entire church. We are to encourage one another with the truth of the gospel.

2. Encouragement is not just a ministry for the spiritually mature

In other words, you don't have to reach a certain level of spiritual wisdom and understanding before you can pass along some encouragement to someone else. In fact, just the opposite is true. If you have the Holy Spirit in you, and you have God's word in your mind and in your heart - you can (and should) participate in this ministry of encouragement.

Romans 1:12 - Paul wants to visit the Romans in order to be mutually **encouraged** by one another's faith - not just that Paul might encourage them, but that they might also encourage him! **This is not just a ministry for the spiritually mature.**

3. Encouragement is not just saying nice things, it's saying true things with the aim of building up.

It may be really kind to tell someone you like their dress, but that isn't Christian encouragement. There is nothing wrong with complimenting someone, but remember - Christian encouragement is **rooted in the gospel.** The aim in Christian encouragement is not simply to say something nice, but to speak words that would build up our brothers and sisters in Christ.

It's easy to say something nice to someone, but sometimes it's harder to say something true that would build them up.

Sometimes, we need to be encouraged to STOP doing something that we're doing wrong, or to START doing something right that we're not doing. Those types of encouragements are a little harder to give, but they're necessary.

1 Thess. 2:12 - "We exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory."

This is a call to gospel obedience! They are being encouraged to walk in a manner worthy of God.

2 Thess. 3:12 - Paul is talking about people in the church who are idle - they are not contributing. He says, "Now such persons we command and **encourage** in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living."

They need to be encouraged ... and commanded ... to get up and work! They need encouragement to stop being idle and to start working as they should! That type of encouragement is a little harder to offer our brothers and sisters because it may not always be what they want to hear.

So from all of this.... Let me take a stab at giving you a definition of encouragement.

Working Definition : **Biblical encouragement is a ministry of the word, with the aim to build up and strengthen the church in knowledge and obedience to God's will.**

Well what can this look like for us? I have a handful of applications here for us, but before we get there let me **pause for any questions.**

Applications:

1. Fill yourself with words of truth - out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.
2. Share what you are learning with others - discuss the sermon after church.
3. Share how you are laboring with others - example of Paul in Colossians
4. Be intentional : Seek out opportunities to encourage. You won't have to look hard!
5. Be prayerful: Pray for God to help you be an encouragement. Pray for others to use their words to encourage.
6. Be specific. Try to be specific rather than general. Look for evidences of grace in one another. Tell one another specifically how they are an encouragement to you!
7. Be open. Encouragement requires that we are open with one another about our struggles. When others know of our needs, they are better able to come alongside us to offer the encouragement that we need!

Does anyone have any questions or comments as we wrap up our time together?

To sum this all up - encouragement is something that is commanded of all of us, needed by all of us, and possible for all of us. And as we seek to speak the truth to one another and urge one another on, I'm confident the Lord will use the ministry of encouragement for the good of this church and the glory of his name. **Let's pray.**