NPS Bible Study Lesson 6

MARKS OF MATURITY: BIBLICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF A CHRISTIAN LEADER

Mark #13: Having Courage and Being an Encourager

Introduction

The Prussian king Frederick the Great was widely known as an agnostic. By contrast, General Von Zealand, one of his most trusted officers, was a devout Christian. Thus it was that during a festive gathering the king began making crude jokes about Christ until everyone was rocking with laughter—all but Von Zealand, that is. Finally, he arose and addressed the king:

“Sire, you know I have not feared death. I have fought and won 38 battles for you. I am an old man; I shall soon have to go into the presence of One greater than you, the mighty God who saved me from my sin, the Lord Jesus Christ whom you are blaspheming. I salute you, sire, as an old man who loves his Savior, on the edge of eternity.”

The place went silent, and with a trembling voice the king replied, “General Von Zealand—I beg your pardon! I beg your pardon!”

And with that the party quietly ended.

It took courage for General Von Zealand to stand and proclaim his allegiance to the Savior in circumstances like that, but of course, here was a man who was no stranger to courage. One of the required character qualities in any leader is courage. “Courage of the highest order is demanded of a spiritual leader—always moral courage and frequently physical courage as well.” But courage is not only a necessary quality in a leader, it is a quality needed in every Christian’s life if he or she is going to be able to boldly follow and persist in the will of God. Ultimately it becomes a mark of maturity where it is consistently evident. Oftentimes pursuing the will of God calls on the Christian to take a stand that may put him or her at risk, at least emotionally if not physically or financially or socially or politically.

In the New Testament, Joseph of Arimathea provides a good illustration of one who gained courage as he grew in his knowledge of the Savior:

Mark 15:43 Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. (NASB)

According to Matthew 27:57, Joseph was a wealthy and reputable member of the Council, a non-Jewish designation used by Mark for the Jewish Sanhedrin. Though a member of the Sanhedrin, Luke 23:51 tells us that he had not approved of the Sanhedrin’s decision to put Jesus to death. Further, in both Mark 15:43 and Luke 23:51, we are told that Joseph was personally waiting for the kingdom of God. This suggests he was a devout Pharisee who had come to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. Previously, however, according to John 19:38, Joseph had been a secret disciple who had feared the Jewish authorities. In other words, up to that point, he lacked courage.

But seeing the death of the Savior, a monumental evidence of who He was—the Son of God bearing the sin of the world—Joseph gathered up his courage and went boldly to Pilate. “Gathered up his courage” is a translation of the Greek tolmao, “to dare, have courage, be bold, be brave enough.” Joseph’s behavior was seen as an act of courage by Mark because:

(a) he was not related to Jesus; (b) his request was a favor that would likely be denied on principle since Jesus had been executed for treason; (c) he risked ceremonial defilement in handling a dead body; (d) his request amounted to an open confession of personal loyalty to the crucified Jesus which would doubtless incur his associates’ hostility. He was a secret disciple no longer—something Mark impressed on his readers.108

As with all the other qualities of maturity and leadership, the Lord Jesus is our greatest example of courage. While none of the words used in the New Testament for acting courageously or boldly are specifically used of Jesus, He is still the epitome of courage as one who followed the will of God in the face of the greatest hostility and antagonism. Though He was deeply troubled when he was facing the cross where He (the sinless one) would bear the sin of the world, He courageously committed Himself to the will of the Father.

John 12:27-28 “Now my soul is greatly distressed. And what should I say? ‘Father, deliver me from this hour’? No, but for this very reason I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”

Jesus drew his courage from His faith in His purpose and in what the Father had promised to do. Thus, resting completely in the victory He would accomplish to defeat Satan, the world, and sin, He not only went boldly to the cross, but that’s not all. Just hours before His arrest, Jesus also sought to be an encourager and impart courage to His disciples:

John 16:33 I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In the world you have trouble and suffering; but have courage, I have conquered (overcome) the world.

As it relates to courage, there are a couple of powerful lessons here. First, Jesus gave us an example of courage and of the need for us to become encouragers. Right after demonstrating His own love and courage, He called upon His disciples to be courageous in the face of the many pressures, afflictions, and challenges they would face as His disciples in a hostile world. In doing so, He shows us that mature Christ-likeness seeks to impart courage to others as an encourager regardless of what one might be facing himself. Let us never forget that when we go through the fire, others are watching. May we be reminded that God is committed to reproducing in us the character of Jesus Christ. The qualities we see in His life in the Word are the very ones God want to reproduce in us and this will require suffering at times. Spiritual growth and greatness in God’s kingdom does not come through ease and luxury as those promoting the health and wealth gospel claim. Rather, it comes through pain and tears, tools God uses to draw us closer and closer to Himself. Even the Lord Jesus was perfected by the things which He suffered.

Hebrews 5:7-10 During his earthly life he offered both requests and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death and he was heard because of his devotion. 5:8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience through the things he suffered. 5:9 And by being perfected in this way, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, 5:10 and he was designated by God as “high priest in the order of Melchizedek.”

But there is a second and important truth in John 16:33. With the words, “I have conquered the world,” Jesus points us to the basis for courage. Against whatever we might face in this life, our capacity for courage rests in the historical events of the person, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ who now sits enthroned at the right hand of the Father. Here is the Christian’s basis for ultimate victory; Christ’s victory is the foundation for courage and the ability to live victoriously in life. It was to this end that the apostle prayed for the Ephesians in Ephesians 1:18b-22, but note especially verses 20-22.

… so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 1:19 and what is the incomparable greatness of his power toward us who believe, as displayed in the exercise of his immense strength. 1:20 This power he exercised in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms 1:21 far above every rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 1:22 And God put all things under Christ’s feet and he gave him to the church as head over all things (Ephesians 1:18b-22).

Again, the Lord Jesus is our example, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. He is both our example for being courageous and becoming encouragers, and He is the basis for courage

The Meaning and Nature of Courage

COURAGE AND FEARLESSNESS

The Original Roget’s Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases lists boldness and fearlessness as synonyms of courage, but courage often exists in spite of the presence of fear.109 In fact, it is probably true that courage is doing what one is afraid to do. Indeed, courage is the capacity to resist fear, to master it, not its absence. Thus, courage is that quality of the heart or mind that gives one the ability to encounter danger and difficulty with firmness and resolve in spite of the presence of fear. “Courage is being scared to death but saddling up anyway.”110

The apostle Paul was not one who courted danger nor did he presume upon the Lord. As one who tenaciously pursued the will of God, Paul was always willing to move forward into danger if he was convinced it was God’s will or that it was right even though his heart might have been gripped with fear.

1 Corinthians 2:1-2 When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come with superior eloquence or wisdom as I proclaimed the testimony of God. 2 For I decided to be concerned about nothing among you except Jesus Christ, as one who had been crucified. 3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. (emphasis mine)

2 Corinthians 7:5 For even when we came into Macedonia, our body had no rest at all, but we were troubled in every way—struggles from the outside, fears from within. (emphasis mine)

Sanders writes,

Martin Luther possessed this important quality in unusual measure. It has been asserted that he was perhaps as fearless a man as ever lived. When he set out on his momentous journey to Worms, he said, “you can expect from me everything except fear or recantation. I shall not flee, much less recant.” His friends, warning him of the grave dangers he faced, sought to dissuade him. But Luther would not be dissuaded. “Not go to Worms!” he said. “I shall go to Worms though there were as many devils as tiles on the roofs.”

… But not all men are courageous by nature as Luther was, and that fact is both explicit and implicit in Scripture. The highest degree of courage is seen in the person who is most fearful but refuses to capitulate to it. However fearful they might have been, God’s leaders in succeeding generations have been commanded to be of good courage. Had they been without fear, the command would have been pointless…”111

COURAGE AND MATURITY

As we saw with Joseph of Arimathea, courage is very much a part of spiritual growth and maturity because it is so vital to other qualities of Christ-like character. Speaking of the Lord Jesus, John wrote, “He had loved his own who were in the world, and now he loved them to the very end” (John. 13:1). But without the courage to face the horrors of the cross, He could not have loved them, and us, to the end or to the uttermost, the cross.

C. S. Lewis wrote, “Courage is not simply one of the virtues but the form of every virtue at the testing point, which means at the point of highest reality.”112 Without courage, men and women will fail to be loving, to sacrifice, to count the cost, to tackle the challenges or take on the responsibilities that God calls them to.

Undoubtedly, one cause of remaining immature and one of the shortest routes to ineffectiveness is to run scared, to be overly cautious, to play it close to the vest. Unless, through the courage of faith, we are willing to saddle up, we will simply remain in the corral and miss the growth experiences and fruitfulness of the open range.

How much better to take on a few ornery bears and lions, like David did. They ready us for giants like Goliath. How much more thrilling to step out into the Red Sea like Moses and watch God part the waters.… How much more interesting to set sail for Jerusalem, like Paul, “not knowing what will happen to me there,” than to spend one’s days in monotonous Miletus, listening for footsteps and watching dull sunsets. Guard your heart from over protection.

Happily, not all have opted for safety. Some have overcome, regardless of the risks. Some have merged into greatness despite adversity. They refuse to listen to their fears…113

Frankly, courage is learning to tell our fears where to get off, not just so we can be brave but so we can courageously face the hurdles and continue on in the race God has laid out before us. Otherwise, there will be little or no progress in growth and little or no fruitfulness here in time and for eternity.

The Means and Source

of Courage or Encouragement

Naturally, the question arises, where do the courageous get their courage? Or how do we develop the quality of courage in ourselves and in others? How can we learn to tell our fears to get lost? Some men might naturally be more courageous than others, as might have been the case with Martin Luther. But even with Luther, his courage was primarily a product of his biblical convictions and undauntable faith.

Needing courage or to be encouraged is one of the common experiences we all face as finite human beings, and we should never think it odd if we reach a place where we need to be encouraged. Such is clearly evident from Scripture itself where we often find the people of God in circumstances where they needed to be encouraged. Thus, Paul wrote:

2 Corinthians 7:5-7 For even when we came into Macedonia, our body had no rest at all, but we were troubled in every way—struggles from the outside, fears from within. 7:6 But God, who encourages the downhearted, encouraged us by the arrival of Titus. 7:7 We were encouraged not only by his arrival, but also by the encouragement you gave him, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your deep concern for me, so that I rejoiced more than ever.

Facing a variety of troubles from within and without and experiencing fear and disappointment is a part of life though we do need to find courage to go forward. Thus, both finding courage to go forward when fearful, when life seems impossible and the road impassable, and giving encouragement to the discouraged or fearful is an important focus in Scripture. Courage comes from being encouraged. So what does the word encourage mean?

To encourage means give support in order “to inspire with hope, courage, or confidence.” In just the New Testament alone, the terms “encourage” or “encouragement” are found 23 times in the NET Bible and 21 times in the NASB, and “be courageous” or “be strong and courageous” and “take courage” are found numerous times in the whole of Scripture (cf. Deut. 31:6, 7, 23; Josh. 1:6-9, 18; 10:35; Mark 6:50; John 16:33; Acts 23:1).

So, how may we define encouragement biblically speaking? In the light of the whole of Scripture, we might define encouragement as follows:

Encouragement is finding (or helping others to find) the courage, by God’s grace and strength, to run the race He has laid out before us no matter how difficult or painful the course.

Everyone can become discouraged over conditions or lack courage to take on a responsibility or face a daunting task or a trial. Fortunately, we have a loving Lord who, having given His all for us, is committed to our need which includes our encouragement. Thankfully, He has numerous ways or tools He uses to encourage His people. Thus, what are some of the ways God gives courage or encouragement?

THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF SCRIPTURE AND THE PROMISES OF GOD

Of all the sources of encouragement, the Scripture is one of our greatest—if not the greatest source of encouragement. God’s holy Word with its many principles and promises is our most important and fundamental source of encouragement because it is God’s special and authoritative revelation to us of both Himself and His plan of salvation in Christ.

Let us remember that all of the principles and promises of the Bible are based on the character and being of God’s person and His historical acts in salvation just as He has promised. For instance, the book of Deuteronomy contains Moses’ instruction given during the final months of his life. The setting for this is significant. The new generation was encamped in the plains of Moab prior to their entrance into the Promised Land. They were facing fortified cities and warring people, some of whom were giants. As they entered this new land there would also be many temptations and a whole new way of life. And all of this was to take place under the leadership of Joshua who at that time was unproved, at least as Moses replacement. Further, this new generation had not personally experienced the deliverance out of Egypt or at the Red Sea or the giving of the Law at Sinai. Thus, if they were to have the courage needed to face the difficulties before them, they needed to be reminded of God’s person and his historical acts of deliverance. So Moses wrote these words in Deuteronomy 6.

“When your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What do the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments mean which the LORD our God commanded you?’ 21 then you shall say to your son, ‘We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt; and the LORD brought us from Egypt with a mighty hand. 22 ‘Moreover, the LORD showed great and distressing signs and wonders before our eyes against Egypt, Pharaoh and all his household; 23 and He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land which He had sworn to our fathers.’ (emphasis mine) (Deuteronomy 6:20-23)

Another illustration is Solomon’s prayer of dedication when the temple was completed. There, remembering God’s historical acts of faithfulness, he wrote regarding the nation of Israel:

53 “For Thou has separated them from all the peoples of the earth as Your inheritance, as You spoke through Moses Your servant, when You brought our fathers forth from Egypt, O Lord God.” 54 And it came about that when Solomon had finished praying this entire prayer and supplication to the Lord, he arose from before the altar of the Lord, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread toward heaven. 55 And he stood and blessed all the assembly of Israel with a loud voice, saying, 56 “Blessed be the Lord, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised; not one word has failed of all His good promise, which He promised through Moses His servant.

Thus, it is this God-breathed, inerrant, and infallible revelation of God in Scripture that provides us with the greatest means of courage.

ROMANS 15:4

For everything that was written in former times was written for our instruction, so that through endurance and through encouragement of the scriptures we may have hope.

In this verse, the apostle stated a vital truth concerning the purpose and ministry of the Scripture. The Scripture is designed to encourage us so that we might have hope. “Encouragement” is the Greek paraklesis, which has a rather broad field of use. Depending on the context, it may mean “exhortation, encouragement, appeal, request, comfort.” Paraklesis and its verb form parakaleo may have a prospective appeal in the sense of an exhortation or appeal for “obedience” or some form of positive “response” (Rom. 12:1, 8). But it also had a retrospective appeal in the sense of “comfort, encourage” in the face of burdens, afflictions, etc. (Acts 20:2; 1 Cor. 14:3; 2 Cor. 7:4). As God’s people we need both, but the focus in Romans 15:4 with the word “hope” is that of encouragement or gaining the courage to move forward in the will of God.

As Romans 15:4 teaches us, our ability to find encouragement from Scripture comes through its instruction. It is the Scripture as God’s special, inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word that informs us about the nature and being of our God. Here we learn about His person,114 His plan of salvation and sanctification (past, present, and future), His purposes in both time and eternity, the principles by which God and His plan operate, and His many promises of salvation, love, grace, mercy, and sovereign care. Included in this revelation is the promise of His impartial discipline and judgment against sin and His rewards for faithfulness. A good illustration of God’s promises based on the character of God is Deuteronomy 31:7-8, but perhaps the classic passage is Joshua 1:6-9

JOSHUA 1:6-9

6 Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. 7 “Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. 8 “This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. 9 “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

In Joshua 1:1-5, Joshua is commissioned by the LORD Himself to become the leader of Israel after the death of Moses. To say the least, this was a daunting task because the nation of Israel had been an extremely difficult people to lead, a fact all too well known by Joshua who had been Moses’ military general in the field. Now God was calling Joshua to be the new leader of this very nation. From the repetition of the words “be strong and courageous” or “be very courageous” and the exhortation against trembling and becoming dismayed, it seems obvious the LORD knew that Joshua, as brave and as faithful as he had been, would still face hesitation and fear in stepping into the shoes of Moses to lead this rebellious nation into the land, a land of giants and fortified cities.

Thus, the Lord carefully sought to encourage Joshua. But it is significant that Joshua’s encouragement to his commission proceeds out of God’s personal communication, i.e., His revelation to Joshua. In fact, verses 1-18 are all related to this revelation from God. First, God speaks and commissions Joshua (1:1-5) and then calls him to be strong and courageous in light of God’s promises (1:6-9). Second, in view of this word from God, Joshua speaks to the people and gives them instructions for preparing to cross the Jordan in three days (1:10-15). This is followed by the response of the people to these instructions which, of course, had its source in the Word of God (1:16-18). Thus, God’s revelation, which is equivalent to our possession of the Bible today, became the source of courage for both Joshua and the people.

Joshua 1:1-9 can be divided into a four-fold source of encouragement for Joshua. In this we learn of four fundamental principles that are vital to courage and encouragement:

(1) Strength and courage come through recognizing and relating to God’s pleasure, His will or having a sense of God’s calling and destiny (1:1-2). With the words “the Lord spoke to Joshua” in verse one we see the principle of revelation from God—biblical insight. It is this that forms the foundation for courage and conviction for faith and action. Our need is to pray and seek God’s will and wisdom from His Word because the foundation for courage is knowing the Word which enlightens us to His will. In addition it is also helpful to recognize our gifts, abilities, and training because this is an important part of preparation, ability, and the necessary confidence to do His pleasure or will. Again, the process is significant here: in verse 1 God speaks—we have revelation from God to Joshua. Then, based on this revelation, Joshua speaks to the people (vs.10). Thus, the courage that is called for here for both Joshua and the people is in part the direct result of the Word and knowing God’s will (see Eph. 5:9-10).

“Joshua” means “the Lord (Yahweh) is salvation.” Joshua’s very name was designed to remind him and Israel that the battle is the Lord’s. Courage comes from knowing this and resting in the Lord as the source of our deliverance and ability for ministry and life.

The next thing we read about Joshua is that he was “Moses’ servant.” Being the servant of Moses illustrates the principle of Luke 16:10-12 and its impact on the development of character and the courage to accept the will and call of God. Though Luke 16:10-12 deals with material blessings, the principle is applicable in other areas of responsibility in life.

Luke 16:10 “The one who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much; and the one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. 11 If then you haven’t been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will entrust you with the true riches? 12 And if you haven’t been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you your own?

The principle of these verses certainly has an application on the development of courage. Courage for service in the larger and more difficult areas of responsibility start with faithfulness in the smaller and less difficult areas. Everyone needs to find a place to serve and grow because normally that becomes the training ground for greater responsibilities and other areas of ministry God may be calling us to.

“Moses my servant is dead” (vs. 2). This fact reminds us that no one is indispensable and leadership changes. If we aren’t training others, we leave gaping holes. We need to be trained ourselves and involved in the process of training others. Effective training is another source of courage because it gives people the confidence to take on responsibility or accept a difficult task.

The command to “arise” emphasizes the need for decisiveness and action. Courage manifests itself in decisiveness and action as root to fruit. Israel was then in the desert and God doesn’t want us in the desert, the place of fear, cowardice, and defeat. The background for this is Numbers 13-14.

But there is another element that is vital to courage and decisiveness in doing the will of God.

(2) Strength and courage come through resting in God’s promises (1:2b-6). To grasp Joshua’s need for courage and to appreciate God’s promises here, we must first take a look at some of the obstacles to God’s commission to Joshua:

The first obstacle is seen the command to “cross this Jordan.” The Jordan river represents a huge obstacle and an impediment to growth, ministry, and progress. There is good reason to believe that the Jordan was swollen out of its banks at this time of the year (cf. Jos. 3:15; 4:18). Further, to cross the Jordan meant to enter into a hostile land, a land full of enemies some of whom were giants and many of whom lived in strongly fortified cities. This was no simple challenge. Remember, the previous generation failed at Kadesh Barnea because they lacked courage to face these very giants.

A second obstacle is seen in the statement, “you and all this people.” This was no small group and the very numbers made this a colossal task. Furthermore, Joshua had the responsibility of leading a people who were noted for being stiff-necked and who threw stones at their leaders. But more importantly, the word “all” reminds us that it is God’s purpose for all His people to move into His will, i.e., to mature and become strong, and to live productively in the will of God.

Nevertheless, regardless of the obstacles, God’s will had been clearly made known to Joshua and he needed to act on this fact.

Now, a brief look at the promises:

There are several promises in verses 2-3, 5, 6, 9, but because of space, we will focus on only two: “To the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel (vs.2),” and “Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given to them, just as I spoke to Moses (vs. 3).” They were going into the Promised Land, to the land God Himself had personally promised to the patriarchs—to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And God, who is immutable, cannot go back on His promises. In fact, God had for some time been preparing the inhabitants for defeat (cf. 2:9f). The land had been theirs for forty years and they had failed to enter in because of unbelief and a lack of courage.

The principle is that God’s Word is filled with hundreds of promises. While many of these are not directly given to the church today, they do illustrate principles that are often applicable to us. In addition, every principle of Scripture ultimately becomes a promise since God’s veracity stands behind the principle. Our need is to know the promises and principles and act on them by faith. These are given to carry us through the Jordan rivers of life—not necessarily remove them. They are not given so we can avoid or go around, but so we can cross them through the enablement God gives us.

But how do we claim and act on these many promises? How do we make these promises a part of our thinking processes?

(3) Strength and courage come through daily renewal in God’s principles (1:7-8). Successful ministry is always related to successful Bible study. The Word is intrinsically powerful and able to produce godly change in believers’ lives as it motivates, encourages, gives hope and direction, and exposes us to both our needs and God’s will and provision. The Word has been given to us to establish a communicative relationship with God. It is a means of fellowship with Him.

But this takes time, quality time and diligence. Note the emphasis on this in these verses. “To do according to all the Law…; do not turn from it…” (vs. 7), and “but you shall meditate on it day and night…” (vs. 8). In keeping with the mentality of our age, the average person today wants a quick fix, an immediate solution or three easy steps. Bible study may involve reading something like the Daily Bread (a helpful and commendable pattern), but this alone is not enough. We also need ‘meat and potatoes’ Bible study. If our Bible study consists of short devotionals we can’t develop a deep understanding of Scripture or a strong biblical faith with life-changing results. Relationship with God, knowing Him, as with any relationship, takes time. It is this deeper relationship and knowledge that provides us with deep biblical convictions and the capacity to have the kind of courage that results in life-changing results and faithfulness in ministry and in life.

(4) Strength and courage come through reckoning on God’s person and presence (1:9). Last, but certainly not least is the promise of the ever-watchful and protective presence of God. This verse focused Joshua on two great principles of God’s Word. First, in the words, “Have not I commanded you,” the focus is on the source of these commands and promises—God’s Person. Who had commanded Joshua? It was no less than Yahweh, the eternal, independent, and sovereign God of the universe who is the God of revelation and redemption, the One who revealed Himself and called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldeans, who gave him the Abrahamic Covenant, and who later delivered this nation, Abraham’s descendents, from the destroying angel in Egypt and rolled back the Red Sea. Similarly, in the New Testament, our call to courage and the basis of our encouragement is the accomplished victory of Christ who now sits at God’s right hand as the victorious Savior.

Ephesians 1:17-23 I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you spiritual wisdom and revelation in your growing knowledge of him, 1:18 —since the eyes of your heart have been enlightened—so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 1:19 and what is the incomparable greatness of his power toward us who believe, as displayed in the exercise of his immense strength. 1:20 This power he exercised in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms 1:21 far above every rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 1:22 And God put all things under Christ’s feet and he gave him to the church as head over all things. 1:23 Now the church is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

The second focus of verse 9, seen in the promise, “for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go,” points us to God’s Presence. For those who know God and are related to Him by faith in the Savior, there is no situation, no problem or enemy that they can or will ever face alone. The Lord is always there as the believer’s constant support and supply. Thus, to his readers who were facing difficult trials and persecution, the author of Hebrews quoted the Old Testament and wrote, “for he has said, ‘I will never leave you and I will never abandon you.’ So we can say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’” (Heb. 13:5b-6).

If we are concerned about the ministries God has called us to or about the Jordans He has called us to cross, we can be absolutely sure that God is infinitely more concerned for our needs than we are. “Indeed, he who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32). “And God will exalt you in due time, if you humble yourselves under his mighty hand, by casting all your cares on him because he cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:6-7).

So, what’s our need? Our need is simply to walk in the light of His person and presence and to count on His sovereign support, guidance, supply, and care through keeping our focus on Him (Heb. 12:1-2).

THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

ACTS 9:31

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria experienced peace and thus was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

It is difficult to determine just how this passage should be translated because of the two Greek participles following the statement, “experienced peace.” Nearly all the versions translate it somewhat differently, but the translation in the margin of the NET Bible seems to fit both the context and the wording of the Greek text best. The margin notes read, “Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria experienced peace. Strengthened and living in the fear of the Lord and in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.” The peace was a result of Paul’s conversion which also led to his departure from the area because of danger to his life. But this time of calm after the storm of persecution was not wasted. It was used as a means of spiritual and physical growth. During this time, the church was strengthened or edified, built up spiritually, undoubtedly through the teaching of the Word (see Col. 2:6-8; 1 Cor. 14:3). It also continued to live in the fear of the Lord and in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit. “The fear of the Lord” is surely a reference to a holy respect for God who, as seen with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), must sometimes discipline His people to promote holiness and faithfulness. “The encouragement of the Holy Spirit” refers to the ministry of the Spirit who, as the Spirit of Truth, uses the teaching of the Word to bring courage and comfort to the church and growth in the character of Christ, transforming believers into His likeness.

The companion truth here is that it takes both the teaching of the Word and the enabling ministry of the Spirit to bring encouragement and comfort. The Holy Spirit is called the parakletos, variously translated “the Comforter” or “the Helper” or, as I prefer, “the Enabler” (see John 14:16. 26; 15:26; 16:17). So interestingly, the word used in Acts 9:31 for “encouragement” is paraklesis which, like parakletos, is from the parakaleo family of words. Parakaleo means (1) “to entreat, beseech,” (2) “to admonish, exhort,” and then (3) “to comfort, encourage.” Thus, we see that the Holy Spirit as our spiritual enabler is vital to our encouragement.

THE ENCOURAGEMENT FROM MEMBERS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

THE ANALOGY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

The body of Christ is one of several pictures or analogies used to instruct us regarding the nature and function of the universal church (1 Cor. 12:12-13, 27; Eph. 1:23; 4:12). This picture portrays both the unity and the diversity of the church as an organic body, a spiritual organism, made up of many individual and diverse parts all designed to work together in a caring and functional way. In keeping with the nature of the church as a body made up of many members, numerous passages of the New Testament show us the important role the whole body has in mutual care and encouragement.

Through its diversity of members, as Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 12, the New Testament has many illustrations of encouragement through the loving care of one another. This occurs in numerous ways. Some have the gift of encouragement (Rom. 12:8), some encourage through communication of God’s revelation (Acts 20:2; 1 Cor. 14:3, 31; 1 Thess. 4:18; Tit. 1:9), other by bringing good news (2 Cor. 7:6-7, 13; Eph. 6:22; Col. 4:8), others by giving various kinds of support—financial, lending a helping hand, giving a word of encouragement, supporting others in prayer, showing concern and just being there for one another (cf. Rom. 12:13, 15; Eph. 4:29; Phil. 1:5; 4:10; 1 Thess. 5:11-12).

KEY SCRIPTURES ON ENCOURAGEMENT (1 THESS. 5:11; HEB. 10:23-24)

Because we are to be supporting one another as members of the body of Christ, Scripture exhorts us to become be involved in encouragement of one another.115 Two passages stand out here.

The first is 1 Thessalonians 5:11 where Paul gives the simple exhortation, “Therefore, encourage one another and build up each other, just as you are in fact doing.” The clear implication here is that building each other up, spiritual edification in the truth of Scripture, as it may apply to any given situation, is vital to one’s ability to give others the courage they need to move forward in the will and purpose of God.

The second passage occurs within the framework of Hebrews 10:19-24. The specific verses directed toward encouragement are 10:23-24, “And let us take thought of how to spur one another on to love and good works, not abandoning our own meetings, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and even more so because you see the day drawing near” (emphasis mine).

Here again we are told to be involved in encouraging each another. The contextual framework in which this admonition occurs, however, is important to encouraging and being encouraged. The author of Hebrews was writing to a group of Christians (primarily Jewish) who had experienced persecution (10:32-34; 13:3) and who were under pressure to return to their ancestral faith for he warns them about abandoning their confidence in Christ and returning to the old Jewish sacrificial system (cf. 3:6; 6:6; 10:35). Further, he was well aware and even addressed the cause of this—a failure to mature and go forward in the full assurance of the superiority of Christ over the old system because of the completeness and sufficiency of Christ’s finished work (see 5:11-6:6 and 10:19f). Thus, having declared the truth of the finality of Christ’s sacrifice in contrast to the lack of finality of the Old Testament sacrifices (10:1-18), the author of Hebrews appealed to his readers to do three things, each one being marked out by the words, “let us.”

(1) “Let us draw near with a sincere heart in the full assurance that faith brings…” (10:22). They (and we) are to get close to God in the sure confidence of an absolute acceptance by God through Christ. Such confidence is in view of His perfect and finished work as our Great Priest over the household of God (10:19-22). The point here is that apart from such mature understanding and faith in the sufficiency of Christ, there can and will be no capacity for courage along the pathway of life with its many trials.

(2) “And let us hold unwaveringly to the hope that we confess, for the one who made the promise is trustworthy” (10:23). They (and we) are to tenaciously cling to the prospect of not just eternal life or entrance into heaven, but of the eternal blessings of the kingdom. This includes participation in the rewards of the kingdom and we can be sure of such rewards because of the trustworthiness of God who had made such promises (vs. 23). The author views believers as partners with Christ and sharers of the kingdom (Heb. 3:1, 14; 2:5-8). Our faithfulness here on earth will result in special privileges in the eternal kingdom, but to be faithful, we must maintain our confidence in the sufficiency of the Savior.

(3) “And let us take thought of how to spur one another on to love and good works,…” (10:24). They (and we) are to give serious consideration to the role we each have to mutually help one another down the pathway of the Christian life as partners in the service of the King. Thus, we are to each consider how we can be used of God to encourage others in the progress of their faith and faithfulness as partners in Christ’s kingdom and enterprise here on earth. The problem is that there are difficulties along our journey that can hinder our determination and courage to follow the Savior and to be faithful to our calling as partners with Him (see Heb. 3:12-14). As a protection and help against the deceitfulness of sin that can sidetrack us, Hebrews 3:13 calls on us to “exhort one another daily.” “Exhort” is parakaleo, which may mean, “to exhort” or “to encourage.” Either way, it shows the mutual responsibility Christians have in helping one another experience the power of Christ for faithful living. But in 10:24, the author gives us more details on this process and purpose.

Literally, the Greek text of verse 24 says, “And let us take note of (observe, perceive) one another.” The verb here is katanoeo, (1) “notice, observe carefully,” (2) “look at (with reflection), consider, contemplate something or someone” (Heb. 3:1; 10:24). The text exhorts us to carefully consider or observe others. Contextually, this is not to be done pharisaically as nit-pickers or as fruit inspectors, but as enablers, as those committed to helping others find the courage they need to go forward in the will of God. The first responsibility is, in a caring way, to genuinely notice people. This is a call to lovingly pay attention to people that we might pick up on their hurts or needs in order to minister accordingly. More will be said on this below, but this is in keeping with Ephesians 4:29, “You must let no unwholesome word come out of your mouth, but only what is beneficial for the building up of the one in need, that it may give grace to those who hear.”

The next part of the verse takes us to the goal of such observation, “to spur or stimulate one another to love and good works.” “To spur” is the Greek paroxusmos, (cf. the English word paroxysm), which may mean negatively, “to provoke, irritate,” or positively, “to stir, stimulate, encourage.”116 Thus, we are to pay attention to people with a view to encouraging them toward love and good works.

Verse 24 then goes on to explain how this objective of verse 23 is to be carried out. There are three things focused on here: two methods or means and a motive.

First, by “not abandoning our own meetings, as some are in the habit of doing.” As previously stressed, one of God’s means for developing and maintaining courage is people—the body of Christ. And one of the places this is to occur is when the church is assembled together whether in small groups or in the main assembly meetings. Simply put, absenteeism hinders the process of encouragement because it cuts us off from caring for others and us from their care. Naturally, just meeting together does not guarantee that the process of encouragement takes place.

So again, using a different word than that of verse 23, we are specifically told to be “encouraging each other.” This is a verb we have met with before, the verb parakaleo. Remember, this verb may have a prospective appeal in the sense of an exhortation or appeal to others for “obedience” or some form of positive “response” (Rom. 12:1, 8) or it may have, as here, a retrospective appeal in the sense of giving “comfort, encouragement” in the face of burdens, afflictions, or difficult circumstances. As God’s people we need both, but the emphasis here is that of encouragement or gaining the courage to move forward in the will of God.

But would you notice that we are not given specifics on what to do in order to encourage others. This is left up to the discretion of believers who, through the wisdom of God’s Word and dependence on the Holy Spirit, are to look for biblical ways to give courage. Note Paul’s words to the Romans:

Romans 15:13-14 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe in him, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. But I myself am fully convinced about you, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct (or admonish) one another.

While the terms encourage or give courage are not used, the principles are fundamentally the same. Through biblical wisdom and the Holy Spirit, Christians can and should be ministering to one another.

Finally, with the words, “and even more so because you see the day drawing near,” an important prophetic or eschatological motivation is brought into the picture. The day refers to that well-known time of Christ’s coming and judgment in the future. A similar use of “day” can be seen in 1 Corinthians 3:13. The urgency of the responsibility of encouraging one another is due to the imminence of this Day of Christ for two reasons:

1. While imminent, there will be an ever growing apostasy which carries with it the danger of apostasy or apathy by Christians (see 1 Thess. 5:4f; 2 Tim. 3:1-13).

2. The coming of Christ for the church will immediately be followed by the Bema, “The Judgment Seat of Christ.” It is here that every Christian will be carefully examined by the Lord Jesus for rewards or their loss on the basis of their faithfulness or works.117

Application: So what then is our responsibility to one another in the body of Christ? The emphasis and focus of this passage in Hebrews is not only instructive, but very contrary to the mentality of our day. The purpose of encouragement is not to simply help one another feel better. As seen in the words, “let us consider one another with a view to love and good works” the first objective is to help one another experience the sufficiency of Christ and Christ-like behavior.

Simply put, every problem, when understood biblically, finds its solution in fellowship with the Savior and with resting in His love and sufficiency, not necessarily in the removal of the problem. Our calling, then, is to help one another experience Jesus Christ. To stimulate or encourage others to love and good works is synonymous with experiencing, in a growing way, the character of Christ or being transformed into His image and character.

Michelangelo, it is said, looked at a block of marble and said, “I see an angel in that block of marble.” God goes into the quarry of sin, takes rough stones, and hews them into the shape of Christ. He is pleased when He looks at us and we remind Him of His only begotten Son, who was a servant.118

Believers, as fellow servants in the body of Christ, are just one of the tools God uses in this process of transformation. This must be the ultimate objective of the encourager.

Knowing Christ intimately and experiencing His transforming life is a repeated emphasis of the New Testament, especially in Paul’s letters. Notice this thrust in the following passages:

(1) Life is to be found in the experience of Christ. He is our source of life and righteousness positionally and experientially.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So the life I now live in the body, I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God who love me and gave himself for me.

(2) When faced with the prospects of death while daily chained to a Roman soldier in his own apartment, Paul’s concern was that he would experience Christ regardless of the outcome.

Philippians 1:18b-21 Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, 1:19 for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the support of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. 1:20 My confident hope is that I will in no way be ashamed but that with complete boldness, even now as always, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or death. 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

(3) People have all kinds of things they rely upon for their comfort or confidence and significance, but having come to realize that such things were really only liabilities and hindered us from the true purpose in life (Phil. 3:2-9), Paul had this to say:

Philippians 3:10 My aim is to know him, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, and to be like him in his death, 3:11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

(4) Then, in thanking the Philippians for their financial support, Paul could write:

Philippians 4:11-13 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content in any circumstance. I have experienced times of need and times of abundance. In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of contentment, whether I go satisfied or hungry, have plenty or nothing. I am able to do all things through the one who strengthens me.

The exhortations of 1 Thessalonians 5:11 and Hebrews 10:23-24 remind us of another principle that is foundational for our willingness and ability to become committed encouragers. It’s the mindset of seeking to serve rather than be served and of considering the needs of others above our own (Mark 10:45; Phil. 2:3-5).

One of the greatest hindrances to “contemplating others with a view to encouraging them to love and good works” is preoccupation with our own needs or fears and defensive strategies by which we seek to promote or protect self. Someone may say, “Hey, it’s good to see you. How are you doing?” But when you start telling them about a need or burden they interrupted with a barrage of their own difficulties. Underlying this kind of response is the issue of being so self-centered that people only make casual conversation as a spring board to talk about themselves. Or they may simply respond, “Oh, I’m so sorry” and then politely slip away. It’s what could be called, the problem of a surface community that only casually gets involved with one another.

To become genuine encouragers or to engage in any form of ministry, we must become ruthlessly honest regarding our motives (see 1 Cor. 4:5). Because of our natural self-centeredness, it is simply too easy for us to either ignore others or seek to help out of some form of self-love—to be appreciated, to gain a hearing, to be recognized, praised, i.e., to get something in return. Undoubtedly, Paul had this in mind with his appeal to “let love be without hypocrisy” (Rom. 12:9).

Some Final Thoughts

To repeat our definition of encouragement, encouragement is finding (or helping others to find) the courage, by God’s grace and strength, to run the race He has laid out before us no matter how difficult or painful the course. The ultimate goal of the encourager, then, is to help others relate their lives to the Savior and rest in His love, plan, purpose, and provision. Ultimately, if we haven’t helped others to rest in God alone as the source of their courage, comfort, and hope, then we have fallen short as encouragers. I remember after my Dad had passed away from lung cancer, a number of people came to encourage my Mom. She was very appreciative of their care and concern, but I remember her saying we need the encouragement and comfort of others, but ultimately, unless we find our comfort in the Lord who alone is the God of all comfort, we will never truly be comforted. This echoes the words of the Psalmist:

Psalm 62:5-8 My soul, wait in silence for God only, For my hope is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation, My stronghold; I shall not be shaken. On God my salvation and my glory rest; The rock of my strength, my refuge is in God. Trust in Him at all times, O people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us. [Selah].

As part of the process of seeking to do this, there are many practical things we can do to demonstrate love, thoughtfulness, and encourage others.

First, what better place to teach and practice encouragement than in the intimacy of one’s home. The home is nothing less than the laboratory of life—the place any facade becomes quickly obvious and where life makes up its mind and can find its greatest encouragement. But too often our homes tend to be places of discouragement through apathy in the pursuit of success or material things or through the prevalence of a critical, overbearing, and sometimes legalistic spirit. Spouses, however, as helpers fitted to each other by God’s design, should become courage givers, parents should encourage their children, and children can even learn to encourage their brothers and sisters and their parents. Children naturally pick up the art of encouragement from their parents when they are the recipients of the mother’s and dad’s words of love, hope, acceptance, approval, and patient instruction. Paul undoubtedly had this in mind when he warned fathers against exasperating their children to anger and appealed to them to become those who nourish them up (physical and spiritual nourishment) in the training and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

Second, here are a few ideas to help us put encouragement into action.

1. As we seek to follow the guidelines of Hebrews 10:23-24, we might seek to observe and mention admirable character qualities we see in others, such as punctuality, tactfulness, faithfulness, thoroughness, diligence, honesty, compassion, vision, and faith.

2. As servants who are seeking to be observant encouragers of others, we might notice and call attention to a job well done or to the faithful use of one’s spiritual gift(s). Such is encouraging because it can help people recognize their own spiritual growth and value in the body of Christ.

3. Then, we should especially show support and offer whatever help we can to someone who is going through deep waters or is struggling with a particular problem. While we can’t relieve the problem or make it go away, we can demonstrate God’s love and care and offer words of concern, hope, and comfort. This involves the power of a word given at the right time and in the right way—an important message in the book of Proverbs:

Death and life are in the power of the tongue (Prov. 18:21)

Anxiety in the heart of a man weighs it down, but a good word makes it glad (Prov. 12:25).

A soothing tongue is a tree of life (Prov. 15:4)

Pleasant words are a honeycomb, Sweet to the soul and healing to the bones (Prov. 16:24).

Like apples of gold in settings of silver Is a word spoken in right circumstances (Prov. 25:11).

In their book on encouragement, Crabb and Allender write:

The Scriptures also say that speaking light words of cheer at the wrong time is “like one who takes off a garment on a cold day” (Prov. 25:20).

Words are important. They have very real power. James warns us that although the tongue is a small part of the body, it has the power to determine the whole course of human existence (James 3:5-6).

When God instructs us to encourage one another whenever we come together, He is including the admonition to harness the power of words for a specific purpose. Of course, there are many ways to encourage one another by kind deeds as well as by kind words—taking food to sick friends, visiting folks in the hospital or inviting new folks in church to dinner. But the capacity of words to do serious damage or great good makes verbal encouragement an especially important topic to consider. And that is the theme of this book: encouragement through the careful selection of words that are intended to influence another person meaningfully toward increased godliness.119

So our words need to be carefully weighed because they can either sting or soothe, help or hurt, tear down or build up. This is why Paul warned:

You must let no unwholesome word come out of your mouth, but only what is beneficial for the building up of the one in need, that it may give grace to those who hear (Eph. 4:29).

Let’s note three things about this verse:

(1) We are told that no unwholesome word is to be spoken. This means every word that proceeds out of our mouth is to be carefully weighed according the objective of this verse.

(2) Further, each word is to be weighed so that it is consistent with the objective of building up the one in need. If what is said will compromise or hinder this biblical goal, it is to be rejected. The emphasis here is not on what we say, but on why, on the motivation that stands behind our words. Having the right purpose will go a long way in correcting what is said.

(3) Finally, in this context, the warning against an unwholesome word concerns using the wrong words, those that are critical, hurtful, or frivolous, or words that are spoken at the wrong time, those that aren’t carefully weighed according to the need of the moment.

God has called us to be encouragers or courage builders. The goal is never simply to help people feel better or to be more comfortable. The goal is to help people experience the sufficiency of the Savior and continue on in the race with their eyes fixed on the finish line regardless of the hurdles or distractions that suddenly loom up along the way. This means we may need to get into the race with a fellow believer, with a parent, a spouse, or a son or daughter and pick them up if they have fallen or put an arm around their waist to help them along.

In the 1992 Olympics, Derek Redmond of Great Britain popped his hamstring in the 400-meter semifinal heat. He limped and hobbled around half the Olympic Stadium track. The sight of his son’s distress was too much for Jim Redmond, who had been sitting near the top row of the stadium packed with 65,000 people. He rushed down flights of stairs and blew past security people, who challenged his lack of credentials to be on the track.

“I wasn’t interested in what they were saying,” he said of the security guards. He caught up to his son on the top of the final curve, some 120 meters from the finish. He put one arm around Derek’s waist, another around his left wrist. Then they did a three-legged hobble toward the finish line.

Derek had not a chance of winning a medal, but his determination earned him the respect of the crowd. His father said, “He worked eight years for this. I wasn’t going to let him not finish.” Whether or not his father knew it, he was acting biblically.

“Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed” (Hebrews 12:12-13).

Some people have to be helped across the finish line. Some have stumbled over their own feet; other have been tripped by family members and so-called friends. We must help those who have fallen into the snares of the devil; we must lift up the fallen, bind up their wounds, and help them on their journey toward home.120

There are many reasons why we struggle and sometimes stumble or just get discouraged when the race seems impossible or overwhelming. Whatever we or others may face, God has called us to become encouragers, those who seek to help each other in running the race God has laid out before us.

Conclusion

In the previous study on endurance and patience, I mentioned that my wife has a serious type of cancer of the bone marrow called multiple myeloma. By God’s grace, we found out about her cancer very early, before it had advanced beyond what one oncologist called stage I. Still, the traditional treatment of the medical establishment in this country is not too promising, to say the least. Because of this she has opted for some alternative approaches that focus on building up the immune system to help the body do what God designed it to do, fight disease including cancer. This has meant a very rigid routine that includes diet, exercise, and a host of supplements designed to enhance the immune system. Naturally, there are conflicting ideas and approaches and one of the difficulties is weighing all choices and claims and choosing which diet to follow and what supplements to take. Frankly, the whole thing sometimes seems overwhelming if not impossible.

As Christians who live by faith in a sovereign God who has laid out a race for us to run, hurdles and all, the Lord is our burden bearer. We are seeking His wisdom, and if it’s His will, healing for my dear wife. Above all, however, she wants Christ to be magnified in her life whether by life or by death. Still, sometimes it is terribly difficult, not just for her but for me also because of my love for her. Facing this disease, praying for wisdom, making the choices, and following the routine requires courage—a lot of courage.

One day recently we’d had a particularly difficult day. Kathie had been to the doctor and was overwhelmed with all that was going on and I wasn’t far behind. Looking at all she had to do and trying to make the right choices appeared hopeless and impossible. I could see the pain in her eyes and the strain on her face. Well, it was time for our afternoon walk. So I said, “Come on, it’s time to walk and we can talk.” We spent that time talking, as usual, but I did most of the talking (not preaching). My goal was to help her (and myself) to rest in the sufficiency of the Savior. I could not “make it all better” nor could I remove the problem, but I could show my love and support and help both of us focus on the eternal perspective and on a God who cares and who is infinitely bigger than any of our problems. I’ll never forget her words and her face as we arrived back at the house some 35 minutes later. With a smile on her face and peace in her eyes, she said, “Thank you sweetheart, that really encouraged me. It no longer seems so overwhelming.”

I know there will be other times like this in the months ahead, but as we are there for each other and as the Lord is there for us, we are committed to giving each other the courage to continue in the fight. With the Lord as our primary source of strength and encouragement and taking it one day at a time, we will find the courage to fight the good fight and continue on toward the finish line together.

Session 14 Review Questions

1. Read Mark 15:42-47 along with the article. What three things demonstrated that Joseph of Arimathea was a man of courage?

2. Using a dictionary and the text of this article, write a definition of “courage” and “encouragement”.

Courage

Encouragement

3. How is encouragement defined in light of the whole of Scripture?

4. Where does God provide us with the greatest means of courage?

5. According to Romans 15:4, what is the purpose of Scripture?

6. What are the four fundamental principles that are vital to courage and encouragement, found in Joshua 1:1-9?

7. Whose battle was Joshua fighting?

8. How does knowing this give us courage in our daily challenges?

9. List some of the specific promises found in Scripture that are most important to you?

10. What is the principal way in which God can speak to us each day?

11. Read Ephesians 1:17-23. How are you encouraged in the following areas?

The hope of His calling

The wealth of His glorious inheritance

The incomparable greatness of His power

Christ’s resurrection and ascension

12. What is God’s promise to us in Hebrews 13:5 and Deuteronomy 4:24?

13. In what specific areas in your life do you need this encouragement?

14. Describe in your own words how the Holy Spirit is an encourager in the believer’s life.

15. How is He an encourager in your life? Please be specific.

16. In what ways are we to be encouragers within the body of Christ?

17. Read Hebrews 10:15-25. Describe how and why we are encouraged to:

Draw near with sincere hearts?

Hold unwaveringly to hope?

Spur one another on?

18. What encouragement do you receive from the following verses?

Galatians 2:20

Philippians 1:18-21

Philippians 3:10-11

Philippians 4:11-13

19. How much time do you spend each day in God’s Word so that you can be encouraged?

20. What will you do to intentionally increase your daily time with God in His Word?

GROUP DISCUSSION

What are some practical things you can do, beginning now, to encourage others? Please be specific about real people who are in your lives now.