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“Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do” (I Thessalonians 5,11).

Encouraging the Discouraged

Central Truth: You can minister to those who are discouraged.

L183. Date: February 1995. **Text:** John 16:1, 6, 20-22, 33; Hebrews 10:22-25. **Topic:** Encouragement; Depression.

The word *discourage* means to have no courage, to lose confidence and hope. It can lead to depression, frustration, and hopelessness. It is not surprising, therefore, that it is one of Satan's favorite tools.

Discouragement comes upon every person occasionally. The aim of this study is to identify its causes, apply the divine remedy for it, and help others overcome it. We must offer encouragement as a part of our spiritual ministry.

Barnabas was an encourager. In fact, his real name was Joses (Joseph); but he had such a spirit of encouragement that his fellow church members nicknamed him “Bar-Nabas,” which means “Son of Encouragement.”

You can be a “Bar-Nabas” if you choose. The Bible commands you to be busy “*exhorting*” [encouraging] others (Hebrews 10:25).

Causes for Discouragement

Jesus warned His disciples of things which would cause them to be discouraged. Those same things are common today.

A hostile world may cause discouragement (John 16:1-3). The world system in which we live does not know God and is in rebellion against Him. It lies in wickedness, under the control of the wicked one. The people of God need not be surprised if the world hates them. It hated Jesus before it hated His followers (John 15:18-21). If you look for acceptance and approval by the secular world, you will certainly become discouraged. Lift

up your eyes to Him whose approval is of greatest importance.

Walking by sight will cause discouragement (John 16:4-6, 16-19). Those disciples were accustomed to Jesus' presence. They could turn to Him at any time. But He was going to leave them. What would they do when He was no longer there? (They did not know of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit at that time [John 7:39].) Jesus had walked before them since He had called them. If they continued to walk by sight, they would be sorely disappointed.

If you walk by sight, you will also be disappointed. Faith is certainty concerning unseen realities. God dwells in the realm of the unseen. Your confidence in Him who is unseen will keep you encouraged when nothing else will.

The fear of trials will cause discouragement (John 16:20, 33). On two occasions, Jesus told His disciples that sorrows and tribulation awaited them. They realized that "*we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God*" (Acts 14:22). That is not a pleasant prospect. To dwell on that will cause discouragement now as it did then. Jesus looked beyond the trials, however, and saw the victory ahead. He has already overcome the world from where our trials come. Live in His victory and rejoice.

The Divine Remedy for Discouragement

The concern of Jesus brings encouragement (John 16:1, 4). Because He was so concerned that His disciples would not be overcome when troubles came, He forewarned them. He spoke these things that they might not stumble when trials came (John 16:1).

He is just as concerned about us. All He has taught to encourage our faith is to keep us from dismay (John 14:1, 4). His thoughts toward us are thoughts of peace, to give us a future and a hope (Jeremiah 19:11). We are not alone. He is watching.

The presence of the Holy Spirit brings encouragement (John 16:7). Read chapters 14, 15, 16, and 17 of the Gospel According to John and mark how many times Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit. He promised that the Spirit would be our companion, our teacher, our indwelling guest, and our encourager (John 14:16-20; 15:26). The coming of the Holy Spirit revolutionized the lives of those disciples, just as His presence revitalizes our lives today.

The fuller revelation of Jesus brings encouragement (John 16:13-15). One ministry of the Holy Spirit is to make real to believers the person and work of Christ. A person filled with the Holy Spirit is excited about

Christ, of whom the Spirit bears witness. He teaches Christians eternal truths which can be understood in no other way (I Corinthians 2:9-16). Even today He teaches us all spiritual things which human teachers could never communicate (I John 2:27). Discouragement fades away as Jesus becomes more personal and more precious.

The promise of Jesus' return brings encouragement (John 16:17-22). He promised that “*in a little while*” His disciples would see Him “*coming in a cloud with power and great glory*” (Luke 21:27). That assurance is enough to see you through any trial, isn't it? The Christian is not waiting for death; he is waiting for Jesus. He does not fear in the dark, for He knows that the Son of Righteousness will soon arise with healing in His wings. Talk about encouraging prospects, there is not one equal to that truth.

The resource of answered prayer brings encouragement (John 16:23, 24). The Father loves us so much that He delights to answer prayer. The Son loves us so much that He delights to intercede for us. The Spirit loves us so much that He delights to assist us in prayer. And Jesus said He guarantees that our prayers will be answered. When you are discouraged, renew your heart through communion with the Father through prayer. He hears and answers.

The revelation of the Father brings encouragement (verses 28-30). Jesus came from the Father; He returned to the Father. He is now at the right hand of the Father. He will soon return to take us to the Father. That encourages our hearts. He is in the Father, we are in Him, and He is in us (John 14:20). Think about that when your spirit is depressed. God is there, right where you are. And He is with you all the time. Be encouraged.

Human Help in Discouragement

Hebrews 10:22-25 is a passage dealing with encouragement. It gives four ways in which we can encourage one another. Examine them and put them into practice.

Encourage fellowship with God. “*Let us draw near with a true heart*” (verse 22). When we draw near to God, He draws near to us (James 4:8). We never seek Him in vain. The person who seeks Him finds Him. When you meet a Christian who is “down,” lift him up by pointing him to God. **Encourage persistence in faith.** “*Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering*” (verse 23). A sincere heart and the unqualified assurance of faith will strengthen you, and you can strengthen the faith of a Christian brother or sister who falters. Say with assurance, “*I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that*

which I have committed unto him” (II Timothy 1:12). Encourage faltering faith. **Encourage faithfulness in Christian service.** “*Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works*” (verse 24). But be able to say, “*Look on me, and do likewise*” (Judges 7:17). One can be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin if a Christian brother or sister does not encourage him to faithfulness (Hebrews 3:13). Set the example and call others to follow. Be faithful, and encourage faithfulness.

Encourage attendance in worship. The writer of Hebrews warns believers against “*forsaking the assembling of [themselves] together*”; instead, he tells them to be busy “*exhorting one another*” (verse 25). The early disciples set an example as they were “*continually in the temple, praising and blessing God*” (Luke 24:53). It is easy to drop out of corporate worship when your spirits are down, but you must not permit it. Worship is the place where your spirit is renewed. And it is the place where you can encourage the spirits of your fellow Christians. We have a responsibility to ourselves to keep up our spirits.

We have a responsibility to other Christians to help them keep up their spirits. God has given to each of us a ministry of encouragement. We should strengthen every Christian we meet. And we will, if we are walking with God.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is discouragement?
2. How is our society discouraging to a Christian?
3. How does the lack of faith cause discouragement?
4. How does the concern of Jesus encourage us?
5. How does the presence of the Holy Spirit encourage us?
6. How does answered prayer encourage us?
7. How can we encourage others to fellowship with God?
8. How can we encourage others to hold their faith?
9. How can we encourage others in Christian service?
10. How can we encourage others to be faithful in worship?