

# ENCOURAGED AND ENCOURAGING



ENCOURAGEMENT (1)

T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM  
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

*Encouraged and Encouraging*

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The Fellowship of Ailbe

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## Welcome to *Encouraged and Encouraging*

Everyone needs encouragement. Just as important, every believer is called to encourage others.

But what is encouragement? What does it accomplish? How does being encouraged affect us? How can we become better and more consistent at encouraging others?

These are the questions we'll be exploring in the *ReVision* series entitled, "Encouragement." We begin by looking at two really great encouragers at work, and then briefly examining the work of the great Encourager.

Who, by the way, dwells in all who believe in Jesus.

*ReVision* studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

And if you find this study helpful, please let us know. How have you benefited from this study? Go to our website, [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org), and use the Contact Us button to share your story.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore  
Principal

## 1 A Discipline for Us All

*Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.* 1 Thessalonians 5.11 (NASB)

### *Where seldom is heard*

One of the unhappy consequences of the materialism, narcissism, and tribalism of our day is a rising sense of disappointment and discouragement. These often lead to other negative affections, such as resentment, fear, anger, desperation, and even hate. People are discouraged for a variety of reasons: The things they strive so earnestly to possess don't actually satisfy them for very long; people are so busy looking out for themselves that no one seems to be looking out for others; and the competition and strife between political and cultural factions makes for more tension than most of us want to endure.

Parts of the American landscape used to be sung about as seldom proffering a discouraging word. Now, discouraging words come at us every day from the media, politicians, co-workers, social activists, and assorted Eeyores who just can't keep their discouragement to themselves. These days it's the *encouraging* word that seldom is heard.

This is especially evident within the Christian community, where the discipline of encouragement founders on the rocks of small visions, poor teaching, the egos of leaders, and a "good enough" view of what it means to follow Jesus.

Paul exhorted the Thessalonians to *encourage* one another. Both the English Standard Version and the New American Standard Bible translate this Greek verb, παρακαλέω, *parakaleo*, as "encourage." It is quite a common verb in the Greek New Testament, and its use varies from context to context. The ways it is used, and the variety of translations to which it is susceptible, give us some insights to the meaning of the word: "ask", "beseech", "exhort", "comfort", "call together", "request", "console", and of course "encourage." To *encourage* therefore is to take action toward someone else, to move that person to action, perhaps even, as Paul has it, to build them up.

Paul believed that we all need to be encouraged. He also believed that we all need to encourage one another. Encouragement, in other words, should be one of the most characteristic ways of our relating to one another in the Body of Christ. Encouraging one another is a discipline for all of us to learn, practice, and benefit from in our walk with and work for the Lord.

We all need more encouragement; and we all need to encourage others more than we do. But just what *is* encouragement? What does it accomplish? How should we practice it? These are the questions we'll be considering in this study.

### *Courage*

Encouragement relates to *courage*. Courage is that disposition of the soul that moves us into the unknown, the uncertain, or even the improbable, full of conviction, confidence, and the expectation of success. Courage relates to the *heart* (Fr. *cour*), which is the seat of affections. Affections – our feelings, hopes, aspirations, attitudes, and dispositions – provide the motive power for the life of faith. Solomon counseled us to keep a close watch on our heart, because all the important issues of life issue from our affections (Prov. 4.23). Jesus said the same, that the heart is the wellspring of our words and deeds, for better or for worse (Matt. 12.34; 15.19; Lk. 6.45).

Like all affections, courage arises from the heart. But it does not originate there. The Holy Spirit of God must give us courage; He alone can cause courage to blossom *in* us, for He has come to dwell in us as the *Encourager*. His Name, and hence His mission in us, is taken from the Greek verb, *encourage*. The Spirit is the

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Encourager, and He is at work within us preparing our heart for encouragement (Phil. 2.13).

Encouragement is a bit like a lightning strike. Lightning strikes occur when electrical charges gathering in the earth combine with electrical charges gathering in the atmosphere. When this happens, a flash of lightning strikes with heat greater than the surface of the sun.

The Holy Spirit is at work within us, preparing the soil of our heart with spiritual charges that can produce a lightning strike of encouragement. The inward work of the Spirit connects with some outward work to generate encouragement in our heart. That *outward* charge must come to us from someone or something else. And it comes – *when* it comes – in various aspects and degrees of intensity and consistency.

And when we are encouraged – when the Spirit of God within us combines with some outward spiritual charge – then we act in a way that both expresses the Person of Jesus Christ and brings us to a higher stage of transformation into His likeness. When we are encouraged, the joy and hope of Jesus swell within us. Our outlook on the world changes as our heart engages the mind of Christ in us to help us see things the way He does (1 Cor. 2.16). We experience a certain spiritual energy stirring within us that wants to come to expression. Some action step is suggested, requiring a degree of courage heretofore not present in us. When encouragement strikes, spiritual energy is released for love and good works (Heb. 10.24). And we are stretched, if only a bit, to become more like Jesus and less like our old selves.

### *Called to encourage*

The Scriptures call the followers of Jesus Christ to encourage one another. The Spirit is working in the hearts of all who believe in Jesus to cause courage to spring up. He is also at work in all who believe to enable us to bring the outward charge of spiritual power that combines with the inward work of the Spirit in others, so that courage ignites, and spiritual energy is released for good works of love.

But this doesn't just happen. We must make up our minds to obey God's Word by encouraging one another, by being the Spirit's agents to bring the spark of courage to the hearts of our brethren in the Lord, that they, overflowing with joy, confidence, and hope, and carried along by the indwelling power of God and His Word, may venture into new areas of life and work, take up new efforts of love and good works, and be transformed into the likeness of Jesus in new and permanent ways.

The world is sinking into a slough of discouragement and despond, where passivity, helplessness, uncertainty, and dread abound. Christians are sinking, too. We need to hear words of encouragement. We need examples of courage that can empower us to new efforts of building one another up in love. We are called to encourage one another.

All that hinders us is the will to do so and a better understanding of what encouragement entails.

### *For reflection*

1. Can you think of a time when you were encouraged? Describe what happened.
2. How are *courage* and *encouragement* related?
3. Who are the people God has put in your life for you to encourage?

*Next steps – Preparation: Commit yourself to becoming an encouraging person. Take that commitment to the Lord in prayer, and pray every day that you will obey the call of God to encourage and build up others.*

## 2 Why Encouragement?

*Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, "What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?" But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest.* Mark 9.33, 34

*The "greatest"?*

The gospels offer four accounts of the dispute that arose among the disciples as they followed Jesus into Capernaum, and which then dragged on after that. Each one adds a little more color to the situation, and what it can teach us about the need for encouragement.

I'm sure this dispute began much earlier, perhaps as early as the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus mentioned the possibility of being great in the Kingdom of God (Matt. 5.17-19). Then, a bit later, when He was commending John the Baptist, the idea of "least" in the Kingdom came up (Matt. 11.11). Perhaps the disciples were already beginning to eye one another regarding that possibility, together with the notion of greatness as well.

Mark tells us that the dispute broke to the surface on their way to Capernaum. Peter, James, and John had just come down from the mount of transfiguration, where they had been privileged to see Jesus in His glory (Mk.9.2-8). Coming down from that experience, they must have been feeling pretty good about themselves. After all, Jesus didn't take *all* the disciples up there.

Then, when they returned to the crowd of people below, the three and Jesus saw the other disciples trying unsuccessfully to cast out a demon from a young boy. They were failing utterly, and don't think Peter, James, and John didn't notice that.

So on the road to Capernaum after that, with Jesus in the lead, the disciples fell into a dispute around the question of greatness. It's not hard to imagine Peter (open mouth, insert foot) suggesting his own primacy, what with his walking on the water and Jesus' "upon this rock" statement just a couple of chapters back. Perhaps James or John then reminded Peter of Jesus' "Satan" comment, and that, after all, he had begun to sink in the sea – at which the others might have smirked a bit, only to be turned on by the Sons of Thunder, chiding them about their inability to help that small boy. That left James and John, brothers, to duke it out verbally with one another – as they no doubt had done all their lives.

Apparently, the conversation became a little heated "What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?" asked Jesus – as if He didn't know. Now, all boasting and puffery ceased, and the disciples were shamed into silence (Mk. 9.34).

*Simmering*

But the dispute simmered, and the argument returned, as Matthew and Luke explain. It seems that a bit later, after they had arrived in Capernaum, the disciples came to Jesus, with the same issue in mind. Apparently, they were still quibbling in the background (Lk. 9.46). They decided to put the matter before Jesus, but indirectly; so they asked Him to render a judgment: "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (Matt. 18.1). All they wanted was a name.

All they got was more shame, when Jesus set a child down in front of them, and challenged them to consider themselves in the light of this example. Being "last of all and servant of all" had not found its way into their job description of "greatest in the Kingdom" (Mk. 9.36).

At that point, John, trying to deflect the argument sought to demonstrate his *bona fides* by reporting that he

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and someone else (“we”, Mk. 9.38) had nobly stepped forward to stop some guy who was casting out demons, but not in Jesus’ Name. Was John seeing a hole here, where he could run the ball through and prove himself to be Mr. Touchdown-Greatest-in-the-Kingdom?

If he was, he would be disappointed. Jesus pricked his bubble and let the air out of John’s balloon (Mk. 9.39).

After that, we don’t hear any more about this greatness dispute.

#### *Of all times and places*

Until the upper room and the night that Jesus would be betrayed, arrested, abandoned, tried, and, on the next day, murdered (Lk. 22.24-28).

Supper was over. Jesus had instituted the Lord’s Supper. He explained that His blood would be shed, and one of them would betray Him to His enemies (vv. 20-22). Right away the disciples began trying to figure out who would do such a thing! Which one of them was the *least* and *surliest* of this group, who would do such a thing to Jesus!

And this caused the old simmering dispute to break out again: Which of us is the greatest?

Leave it to Jesus to refocus the question and restate the answer in a way that silenced the discussion and probably left them all feeling a little embarrassed (vv. 24-26).

All this self-serving, boasting, putting others down, maneuvering for pride of place, and casting doubts on one another left this “band of brothers” a shattered, scattered wreck of every-man-for-himself, probably pointing fingers as they fled and wondering how everything had gone so wrong so quickly.

Don’t we see something of a mirror of ourselves in the disciples? Self-interested, always ready to talk about ourselves, rarely considering the thoughts, feelings, interests, or needs of others? It’s probably too much to expect of the disciples that they would have been more thoughtful, affirming, and encouraging to one another. After all, they did not yet have the Spirit of God, the supreme Encourager.

But what about us? If we can agree that the disciples’ behavior in this instance looks more like the narcissistic, self-centered world of our day, than of the Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, then perhaps we can look to the greatest Encourager of all to learn how we might avoid the mistakes of the disciples and be more like the One Who is at work within us, transforming us into the image of Jesus Christ.

#### *For reflection*

1. What do you understand to be the key components of genuine encouragement?
2. Why do we see so little genuine encouragement among the members of the Christian community?
3. Can you think of one situation in which Jesus encouraged someone? How did He do that?

*Next steps – Preparation: Would you consider yourself an encouraging person? Would others say that you are an encourager? Talk with the Lord in prayer about these questions.*

### 3 Wee Little Gutsy Guy

*Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold."* Luke 19.8

#### *Small and despised*

Can you picture the situation? Jesus is passing through Jericho, and the people line the road to see Him. There was a great crowd of perhaps mostly ordinary folk, a few Pharisees and their cohort, and maybe some sick or lame people, hoping for a cure. There was bustling and jostling and huzzaing aplenty, we can imagine.

And then there's Zacchaeus. Everybody knew him, and no doubt everybody despised him. He was a tax collector. He worked for the Romans. Jews who worked for the Romans, collecting taxes from their neighbors, were looked upon with scorn and disgust. The fact that Jesus ate with tax collectors was used to paint Him in an unfavorable light (Matt. 9.11; Lk. 15.2).

Zacchaeus was rich. Everybody knew he was rich, because he had the best home, the best clothes, and threw the best dinner parties. It's not unlikely that some of that wealth was skimmed from surcharges or overcharges of taxes from his neighbors. People would have despised him for that as well.

And he was short. Too short to see over the crowd. The crowd, it seems, was not inclined to part like the Red Sea and let him through to the front. Rather, I can imagine that, wherever he tried to break through, the crowd stiffened and delighted in blocking him out. "Serves him right, the little jerk" they probably thought among themselves.

Zacchaeus was getting no help and no encouragement in his desire to see Jesus.

But he was not going to give up. So the wee little man ran ahead of Jesus and his entourage and climbed up to the lowest branches of a sycamore tree. Spiritual energy was stirring in his soul. Rich guys don't climb trees. He was determined to see Jesus.

He could not have imagined what would happen when the spiritual energy from Jesus struck like a lightning bolt of encouragement in his quickening soul.

#### *Surprised and shamed*

Let's look carefully at Luke's report. When Jesus arrived at the place where Zacchaeus was sitting in the tree, "He looked up and saw him" (v. 5). That is, Jesus *acknowledged* Zacchaeus by stopping and looking him in the eye. No one in the crowd had done that. They wouldn't dare act like they noticed him, much less look him in his face; he was, after all, a Roman official. So they acted as if he wasn't there, even as they blocked him out and refused to let him come through.

But Jesus stopped *and* looked. Well, that must have been very satisfying to Zacchaeus. Certainly more than he hoped for. He only wanted to see Jesus. He didn't expect that Jesus would see him, much less stop in front of him, and look deliberately at him. Can you feel Zacchaeus beginning to sweat a little in his soul?

Then, incomprehensively, Jesus spoke his name: "Zacchaeus." Zacchaeus was perhaps familiar with people greeting him by name. They'd pass him on the streets and maybe bow a bit and say, "God be with you, constable Zacchaeus" before spitting as he passed. Being called by his name wasn't a big deal.

Until now. "How does *He* know my name?" must have been his first thought. Not only had Jesus

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acknowledged him by looking at him. Now He was actively *attending* to Zacchaeus by initiating communication with him. Before Zacchaeus could think too much further, Jesus did the unthinkable: He *affirmed* Zacchaeus by coming over to his side and inviting Himself for a visit in Zacchaeus' house! No respectable Jew would be caught dead in the house of a tax collector (v. 7). But here was Jesus, inviting Himself over for dinner and who knew what else.

Once at the house, apparently arrested and advised by nothing more than his now-active conscience, Zacchaeus – ashamed by Jesus' Presence? – resolved to give half of his goods to the poor (v. 8). Had that thought been throbbing in his conscience for some time? Had he been under conviction by the striving of God's Spirit (Gen. 6.3)? Did the very Presence of Jesus encourage him to proffer this unrequested offer, as an act of repentance and penance?

And, just for good measure, knowing the Law of God as he surely did (Ex. 22.1; Lev. 6.5; Num. 5.6, 7), Zacchaeus submitted to the justice of God in promising to make restoration *if* he had taken anything from his neighbors under false pretense. That *if* looks more like *pretty sure* to me.

Acknowledged, attended to, and affirmed by the Son of God, and advised by His Word, Zacchaeus *acted* courageously, in a manner probably no tax collector in his day ever acted. He acted like Jesus would.

#### *Lost and found*

Notice how Jesus *agreed* with Zacchaeus and his chosen course of action: "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham..." (v. 9). Zacchaeus had been among the lost sheep of Israel. Far from acting like a son of Abraham, he had been acting like the enemies of God's people – a wolf in sheep's clothing.

The word about what Zacchaeus would begin to do must have spread through Jericho like a brushfire. His was a courageous act, a step into the unknown, the uncertain, and the difficult. He had experienced a new courage in his heart to do something right and loving, even though it would cost him personally. How would his neighbors receive him when he came to repay what he had stolen? Would the poor even accept his gifts? What would his fellow tax collectors say? Would they threaten him? Disown him? And the Romans! What would the Romans do once the word got out concerning what Zacchaeus was doing?

Didn't matter. Jesus had encouraged the wee little scoundrel, and now he had become a new man, with new resolve, and new inward energy to do that which was according to the Word of God and the example of Jesus. Zacchaeus would undertake a gutsy path of penance and renewal; he would bear any scorn, derision, isolation, or punishment to carry out what he had become encouraged to do by Jesus.

And when we are truly encouraged, or when we encourage others, we and they will act courageously as well.

#### *For reflection*

1. Why do you think Zacchaeus was so eager to see Jesus?
2. How would you describe the "spiritual chemistry" that transpired between Jesus and Zacchaeus?
3. Why do we say that Zacchaeus' course of action was courageous? What should we learn from this?

*Next steps – Transformation: Wait on the Lord to search your soul for any lingering sin. Do you need to take any courageous action of repentance or penance today?*

## 4 Well-Watered Woman

*“Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?”* John 4.29

### *Stranger at the well*

Can you see her? Skulking out of town in the heat of the day? Who goes to draw water at noon? Women went to the well early, to gather and greet and chatter and draw the cool water they would need for the day. But not this woman. She didn’t want to mingle with the other women – the respectable women of her village. It’s likely, in fact, that she didn’t want to have to speak to anyone in town, for fear of what they might say to her.

She was not the town’s most upstanding citizen. She’d had five husbands. But the man she was living with now was not her husband. Would that have been scandalous? In a small town, everybody knows everyone else. And everyone knew this woman. Respectable women would likely have chosen not to associate with her. We can imagine that the looks she might have received from the people of the town communicated varying degrees of disappointment and disdain.

She preferred to avoid the people of her village, if possible. So here she was, the sun high and hot overhead, coming to draw water from the town’s ancient well.

Perhaps from a distance she could see that her efforts to avoid others had been in vain. A Man was waiting at the well. “What’s He doing here?” she might have thought. “Who is He, anyway?”

Well, she wasn’t going back without water, she thought. She’d just go on ahead, paying no attention to the Stranger, get her pail of water, and get back to town without any to-do.

That’s probably what she hoped, at any rate.

But before she could get her pail over the side, the Stranger spoke. “Give Me a drink.” Say what? Who had ever asked this woman to help them with *anything*? Who would have wanted to be seen *asking* her for anything? (“What’s *He* after?”) Was something kindled in her soul as she noticed that this Stranger didn’t have anything with which to draw water? And that, not knowing her – as she thought – He’d kindly asked her to help Him?

He had looked at her and treated her as a normal, respectable woman, a woman who would kindly and certainly serve His need, just as Rebekah had served the stranger who appeared at her town’s well (Gen. 24.1-20). He had *acknowledged* her as a human being, nothing more or less, and *affirmed* her willingness to serve. What must that have been like for her? To be treated like a normal, respectable person? A person who was kind and willing to serve?

### *Piqued*

Something spun up within her soul. She was piqued, and rather than merely go humbly to the task of meeting this Stranger’s need, she sought to score a point for her village. We can imagine her, standing tall, arms akimbo, as she said: “How is that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” Take that, Jew guy. She was feeling a little better about herself.

The Stranger was giving her His full attention, as He engaged her in conversation; and what a strange conversation it was: “If you knew the gift of God, and Who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.” That was arresting, to be sure; yet she stayed the course of her pique: “Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? Are You greater than our father

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Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?”

He persisted: “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”

Everlasting life? What kind of water can accomplish that? No matter. Whatever it was, she wanted it. Now she moves toward the Stranger. We feel her whole attitude changing as she asks Him for water, to slake her thirst, and to make it possible for her never to have to come skulking to this well ever again.

Now the Stranger advised her of the conditions: “Go, call your husband, and come here.” She wasn’t going to allow any mere formalities to get in the way of her objective; she stretched the truth in denying that she had a husband. How would He know, anyway? But then the Stranger spoke in a totally disarming way, demonstrating that He knew her well, and yet in spite of that, He was offering her “living water.” He must be a prophet! He must be.

The conversation continued with the stranger talking about salvation and worshiping God, and the woman becoming increasingly engaged. She tried to join in: “I know that Messiah is coming,” she opined. Then the stranger said to her, “I who speak to you am He.”

*Living water*

Immediately, she knew it was true. The Stranger Who knew her completely, yet Who regarded her seriously and with kindness, was the Messiah. She dropped her pail, raced back to the city, and began confronting everyone with the good news of the Stranger at the well: “Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?”

Less than an hour ago, this woman would not have risked having to speak to anyone. Now she went throughout the city, saying to the men of the city, that she had found the Messiah, and that they must come at once to see Him for themselves. Imagine the courage that took. Who would believe her? How she must have had to plead with those men to come to Jesus. She broke out of her isolation, degradation, shame, and fear, and, alive with living water, she hurried to refresh all those she had previously avoided, urging them to see Jesus and drink from His water themselves.

Courage like that comes only from Him Who is the great Encourager. When the proclamation of Jesus’ Word struck the stirring in her soul, a lightning bolt of sheer courage filled her with holy, spiritual energy, and she became an insistent and persuasive witness for the Messiah.

Pray that Jesus will strike your soul with such courage as well.

*For reflection*

1. What was the effect on this woman of how Jesus regarded her?
2. Why were her actions after encountering Jesus so different from before?
3. We are called to be witnesses to Jesus (Acts 1.8). How can we have the kind of courage to bear witness that this woman realized?

*Next steps – Conversation: Ask Jesus for courage to bear witness to Him today. Begin praying now for the people you will see, and for an open door of conversation that will lead to your bearing witness to Jesus.*

## 5 Courage on the Sea

*So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. Matthew 14:29*

### *Troubled*

It is instructive to consider the response of Jesus' disciples to His urging them not to be afraid (v. 27). Why were they afraid, anyway?

Some were afraid because they weren't fisherman, and weren't used to being in a boat, "tossed by the waves" of the sea (v. 24). I can imagine that, for Matthew and others, this could have been quite harrowing. Peter, Andrew, James, and John would have been concerned. But I doubt they would have been fearful. Probably they had been often on the sea when the wind came up, and they would have known what to do – at least in this situation.

But the disciples were *all* "troubled" (v. 26) when they saw Jesus, walking toward them on the sea. None of them had any experience of this. At first, they didn't recognize that it was Jesus, walking on the sea, and they cried out in fear, "It is a ghost!"

Now fear was equally distributed among them all. "But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid'" (v. 27). That cheerful greeting must have allayed their fear somewhat. But the waves were still tossing, and apparently the disciples weren't completely convinced that the specter approaching them was in fact the Lord.

At least, not Peter.

Peter (who else?) spoke up: "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water" (v. 28). What shall we make of this? Was Peter just showing off? Or was he thinking of something completely unheard-of that might calm the fears of his colleagues? Was he really willing to risk his life, whether to bolster his status among or bring reassurance to the other eleven?

Clearly, something was stirring in Peter's soul. For whatever reason he proposed this extraordinary measure, he was "stepping out" beyond his comfort zone, and beyond all his experience, into an uncertain and perhaps unsafe course. He would need courage to do this, courage to banish, or at sublimate, his fear, and enable him to carry out his proposed course of action.

### *The Word of Jesus*

Jesus took him seriously. He could have just said, "No, no, stay where you are. I'll be there with you soon." But this was an opportunity to encourage Peter, to impart a word of advice and counsel to meet the stirring in his soul, so that courage would flash within him like a bolt of lightning.

So Jesus said, "Come." That's all. Not "OK, but be real careful." Or even, "Be sure to keep your eyes on Me." He met the stirring in Peter's soul, and his outrageous suggestion, with a single Word. "And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus" (v. 29).

How did he do that? This definitely qualifies as a "don't try this at home" experience. But Peter did it, upheld by the gaze and Word of Jesus. As long as Peter looked to Jesus, and kept his eyes fixed on the Savior, he walked on water. Imagine how the other eleven disciples must have responded. Surely the fear they were experiencing increased as they saw Peter step over the side of that boat. What would happen to them if he drowned?

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But when they heard the Word of Jesus, and observed Peter walking toward Him on the sea, their hearts must have leapt within them. The courage by which Peter stepped onto the waves surely must have sparked some sense of hope or relief or gladness or courage in the eleven. Perhaps they even cheered him on: “You go, boy!”

The courage that led Peter onto the waves did not originate in him. His soul was ripe for a courageous act, but he would need something from without to bring that courage to light. That something came from the Word of Jesus; and the courage it produced was sustained by looking to Jesus, clinging to that Word, and obeying the Lord’s instruction against all odds.

### *Oops*

But suddenly Peter’s courage faltered, “when he saw that the wind *was* boisterous” (I love that “boisterous” – it’s like the wind saying, “Oh yeah, well try *this* on for size, human!”) Peter looked away from Jesus, Who was calmly standing there, perhaps, as in [Tissot’s dramatic illustration](#), lifting His hands to receive Peter. His focus turned from the One Who walked on the sea to the sea itself. The sea seemed insurmountable, even though right before him was the One Who had surmounted it.

Peter began to sink. His fear returned, and he cried out, “Lord, save me!” “And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him” (v. 31). Peter had doubted. Doubt banished courage and invited disaster, which opened the door to fear. Fear led to panic. Panic brought forth Peter’s desperate plea.

Courage can lead us to take on challenges such as we have never considered. It can empower us to overcome obstacles that would defeat most people. But courage, while it may stir within our souls, needs spiritual energy from without if it is to spring to life. The courage we need for daily advancing in Christ and His Kingdom comes only from Jesus, in the Person of His Spirit, by the power of His Word, as these are at work within us, willing and doing of *God’s* pleasure and plan (Phil. 2.13).

But while the Lord Himself is the source of courage, it pleases Him both to encourage us to efforts of faith exceedingly abundantly beyond anything we’ve ever dared to ask or think (Eph. 3.20), and to use us to encourage others to courageous works of love and witness. And this makes understanding and practicing encouragement one of the most important discipleship lessons any of us can learn.

### *For reflection*

1. What causes us to be fearful? How does fear affect us?
2. Jesus frequently told us not to be afraid. Why did *He* think we needn’t be afraid?
3. How do you know when someone needs to be encouraged?

*Next steps – Preparation: Pray for courage to serve the Lord faithfully today, and for an opportunity to encourage another believer.*

## 6 Encouraged and Encouraged Again

*And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. Acts 9. 26-28*

### *A twofold challenge*

We can imagine that, when Saul of Tarsus showed up in Jerusalem, announcing that he was now a Christian and wanted to join the disciples, he was met with a good bit of skepticism.

The disciples there were afraid of him, and not without good reason. Not that long ago he had been rampaging through the city, dragging believers out of their homes and locking them up in prison for the “crime” of believing in Jesus (Acts 8.1-3). So zealous and violent was he that the word spread all the way to Damascus that he had “destroyed those who called” on the Name of Jesus in Jerusalem (Acts 9.21).

The believers in Jerusalem were understandably unwilling to admit Saul to their fellowship. So they turned him away.

What would he do now? He couldn’t go back to the Pharisees, for the word about his conduct in Damascus would surely have reached them by this time. He couldn’t very well go to his teacher, Gamaliel, for advice. He was all alone, and he must have wondered whether God would ever be able to use him for the Name of Jesus.

But Barnabas had seen something the others missed. He went to Saul and listened as he told his story about meeting the Lord on the Damascus road, hearing His voice, and how he had preached Jesus to the people in Damascus (v. 27). While everyone else looked askance at Saul, Barnabas sought him out, heard his story, and took him in tow to the apostles.

It’s likely that getting Saul to agree to go to the apostles took a little persuading. It certainly took courage on Saul’s part, given his role in persecuting the apostles and other believers, and the fact that other Christians had rejected him outright.

But Barnabas – whose name means “Son of Encouragement” – encouraged him and went with him to meet with Peter, John, and the others.

And he persuaded the apostles to put their fears and doubts aside and have the courage to welcome this young man into their company. Barnabas himself told Saul’s story to the apostles. As a result, Saul was welcomed into the community of believers, and went in and out among them freely.

Thus Barnabas was able to encourage both Saul and the apostles. Through his efforts, God gave Saul the courage to stand before the apostles; and He gave the apostles courage to welcome Saul into their ranks. The encouragement Barnabas offered Saul and the apostles added a fresh voice to the Gospel witness in Jerusalem, for Saul “spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists” (v. 29).

### *What he did*

Barnabas encouraged Saul by seeking him out and acknowledging him as a brother in the Lord. He listened attentively to his story, and probably advised him to go straight to the apostles. He offered to go with him, and even to advocate for him, to demonstrate his conviction of the truth of Saul’s conversion.

### *Encouraged and Encouraging*

Barnabas encouraged the apostles by getting them to agree to meet with Saul and hear his story. The disciples – believers in Jerusalem – had rejected Saul, so Barnabas went “straight to the top”, as it were, believing that if the apostles – the leaders of the church in Jerusalem – would hear and receive Saul, then everyone else would as well.

But he had some convincing to do to get the apostles to agree to that. After all, these men had known and worked with Stephen, and they had not forgotten Saul’s role in his murder (Acts 7.57, 58), as well as his rampage against their flock.

Surely the quality of Barnabas’ character factored in his being able to gain an audience for Saul with the apostles. Barnabas was generous with his possessions to help the church (Acts 4.36, 37). And “Barnabas” was actually a kind of nickname for him. His real name was Joses, but the apostles found him to be such an encouraging fellow that they named him Barnabas. No wonder they sent him to Antioch to check out the situation there, and to encourage the new believers (Acts 11.22, 23).

Barnabas proved the worth of his name by encouraging the apostles to receive Saul, whom he had encouraged to come before them and share his story.

#### *Best friends*

Barnabas’ encouragement to Saul brought them together as friends and co-laborers, but only after one more extraordinary effort at encouragement on Barnabas’ part.

Saul had been sent away from Jerusalem because the Hellenistic Jews there wanted to kill him. So the only home he had left was back where he was raised, in Tarsus. That’s where they sent him. We can only speculate about what he did there. Study? Pray? Seek to grow in the Lord? Preach in the streets? Probably a little of each.

So one day, while Saul was out doing his thing, who shows up at his door, but Barnabas, encouraging him to accompany him back to Antioch, and to help in growing the church there (Acts 11.25, 26). Saul had to be encouraged by the fact that Barnabas once again had come looking for him, was persuaded of his gifts and abilities, and held out to him a possibility of ministry that Saul had never dared to imagine.

No wonder they called him “Son of Encouragement.” He believed in Saul. He took him before the apostles. He didn’t forget him, off there in exile in Tarsus. He went there to find him, and brought him back and set him up in his first ministry. Both Saul and the Christian movement benefited from the work of encouragement of this selfless man from Cyprus.

No wonder Paul urged believers to encourage one another. He had experienced first-hand the power of encouragement to make all the difference in someone’s life. And he must have believed that multiplying the work of encouragement among the followers of Christ would result in strong believers and a strong movement of the Gospel for the glory of God.

#### *For reflection*

1. Can you think of a time when someone encouraged you? What was that like?
2. How did Barnabas’ encouragement affect Saul of Tarsus?
3. Why should believers be eager to learn how to encourage one another?

*Next steps – Transformation: What can you learn from Jesus and Barnabas about encouraging others? Whom will you encourage today?*

## 7 The Encourager

*If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper [Greek: παράκλητος – parakletos – Helper, Comforter, Encourager], that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.”* John 14.15-18

### *Another Encourager*

The disciples were *not* encouraged by Jesus telling them that He was going away and they would see Him no more (Jn. 14.1; 15.27, 28; 16.5, 6). But Jesus assured them it was for the best that He should return to the Father; for, as He said, if He did not go to the Father, the Encourager would not come to them (Jn. 16.7). But Jesus promised to send the Encourager, Whom He identified as the Spirit of truth (Jn. 16.13).

The ascended Christ sends the Holy Spirit of God to dwell in all who believe, that He might continue the work of encouragement Jesus began while He was on earth. We have already seen how this encouragement was wrought in and by Barnabas. Every believer, all in whom the Spirit of truth has come to dwell, should expect to *be encouraged* and to *be an encourager* to others.

This is in line with Paul’s exhortation to the Thessalonians, that we should encourage one another (1 Thess. 5.11).

But, as we have also seen, encouragement like Jesus gave when He was on earth is not merely some word of affirmation or some enthusiastic “at-a-boy” for a job well done. True encouragement infuses *courage* into the heart, enabling us to undertakings which take us beyond our comfort zone into areas of uncertainty, risk, difficulty, perhaps even danger, but with the hope and expectation of fruitfulness, resulting in glory to God.

Jesus has sent His Spirit, our Encourager, to ensure that we are always able to know and do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we’ve ever dared to ask or think by the power of the Encourager, at work within us (Eph. 3.20). Our responsibility is to *seek* such encouragement as we work out our salvation in fear and trembling, knowing that it is God Himself, in the Person of the Encourager, Who is at work within us to will and do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2.12, 13).

And that lifestyle of encouraging and being encouraged begins by understanding what the Encourager is working to accomplish within us, and how He works to do it.

### *The Encourager at work*

Jesus has sent His Holy Spirit to be with us and in us as our permanent Encourager. His work is to so affect and transform us, heart and mind and conscience, that we actually increase into the likeness of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18), doing those good works which are the evidence that we are God’s workmanship (Eph. 2.8-10).

The Spirit exerts holy and spiritual power within us, power so abundant and strong that it works to make us willing and able to do whatever God requires (Phil. 2.13; cf. Ezek. 36.26, 27). If you are a believer, this power dwells in you; this Spirit has taken up residence in your soul; and this Holy Encourager is primed and ready to do a good work in and through you for the glory of God and the blessing of others and yourself.

His aim above all things is to glorify Jesus Christ (Jn. 16.14), that is, to have Him and His Presence known to, in, and through us – the Light of the world shining in our souls and through all our words and deeds. He does this by testifying of Jesus, opening the eyes of our heart so that we may see Him exalted in glory and be filled with Him in all things (Jn. 15.26, 27; Eph. 1.15-23). The Spirit teaches us all things by comparing spiritual things with spiritual things, from the Word of God and all creation, so that we see the glory of Jesus

### *Encouraged and Encouraging*

revealed on every hand (Jn. 14.16; 1 Cor. 2.12, 13; Jn. 5.39; Ps. 19.1-4). He reminds us, throughout the day, of the things we are seeing about Jesus and learning of Him (Jn. 14.16; Eph. 4.17-24). He guides us into all truth (Jn. 16.13) and, in the process, convicts us of sin, righteousness, and judgment (Jn. 16.8-11). He brings forth holy spiritual fruit in us (Gal. 5.22, 23), equips us with spiritual gifts for making disciples and building His Church (1 Cor. 12.7-11), and empowers us to be witnesses for Jesus Christ by the way we live and the testimony we speak of Him (Acts 1.8).

Jonathan Edwards observed that, where the Spirit of God is doing that work which distinguishes His Presence in the world, delight in God's Word increases; love for Jesus grows; hatred of sin works to rid us of it; and love for our neighbors abounds in all we do.

To summarize, the Spirit of God is at work in us to *give us the courage* to live lives of overcoming self, walking on waters of one kind or another, bearing bold witness to Jesus, and encouraging others in their walk with and work for the Lord.

#### *Filled, or quenching?*

No wonder Paul exhorts us to *be filled* with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5.18-21), to submit to His teaching, hearken to His convictions, nurture His fruit, put His gifts to work, draw on His power for witness, and press on in all aspects of our lives that more of Jesus and less of us may be daily in evidence.

The Spirit of God in us *strives* and *stretches* and *longs* to become larger in us, filling us with courage to live for Jesus in everything we do. As we are filled with the Spirit, we will walk in Him (Gal. 5.16-22), and as we walk in Him we will be encouraged to focus more on Jesus, undertake more unto His glory, be more active in Him, and encourage others toward the same ends.

In 1 Thessalonians 5.19, Paul instructs us, "Do not quench the Spirit." It seems we're either being filled with and walking in the Spirit, or we're quenching Him. We're either sowing to the Spirit or we're sowing to the flesh (Gal. 6.8). Either we're being encouraged by the Spirit, and He is encouraging others through us, or we have become a bottleneck and logjam in that great work of bringing courage to the hearts of God's people for good works of love beyond anything they've ever known.

Being encouraged by the Spirit to good works of love is thus a choice. You can choose to seek Him, submit to Him, be taught and empowered by Him; or you can choose to ignore His Presence in you, keep to the safe and easy path; and never fully realize the exceedingly abundantly more and more power of Jesus to encourage you and others through you.

It's your choice. Choose wisely. Choose courageously. Choose to be encouraged.

#### *For reflection or discussion*

1. How do you experience the Spirit striving and stretching out and longing within you?
2. What does it mean to "be filled" with the Holy Spirit? To "walk" in Him?
3. What are we expected to "sow" to the Spirit each day?

*Next steps – Preparation: Wait on the Lord in prayer, asking Him to show you any area in your life where you are not submitted to His Holy Spirit. Give those areas over to Him immediately.*

*Encouraged and Encouraging*

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. What is encouragement? How does it work? Why do we need it?
2. Can you think of a time when someone encouraged you to some larger step of faith? Explain.
3. Encouragement comes both from within and from outside us. Explain.
4. What are the works of the Holy Spirit as He encourages us?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this part of our study on encouragement?

*For prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.