

Encouragement As We Don't Know It.

10/11/26

"Keep your face always toward the sunshine, and shadows will fall behind you".
– Walt Whitman

"A smooth sea never made a skilled sailor." – Franklin D. Roosevelt

"A problem is a chance for you to do your best." – Duke Ellington

"We will fail when we fail to try". – Rosa Parks

Maybe you have heard these quotes before. These quotes are from people who went through some difficult times during their life. They wrote these words in the hope they will bring encouragement to the generations that would follow them. Tens of thousands of books have been written through the ages on the topic of "encouragement". Think for a moment about your own life. When was the last time you were discouraged? Was it today, yesterday, or the day before? We live in a time where the human race has the ability to be more discouraged than ever before. We have bad information thrown at us all day long. We have our phones and internet that makes sure we are updated to the worst news available because bad news sells. All we hear is how our schools, society, human race, business, and many other things are slowly deteriorating. Look how the news is shaping our view of the church in America. Numbers are down and we see how false teaching has greatly deteriorated the foundation of the church in America. James Talarico, who is running for Senator in Texas, makes sure everyone knows that he goes to church and is studying to be a pastor. Yet, if you listen to his pastor, the church Talarico goes to does not believe in the Virgin Birth of Jesus because there is no way that could happen (they have no faith). They use the Inclusive Bible that voids out "Son of God" in the New Testament. This is disheartening. Then, let's add on the daily challenges of life. You develop a health issue. What do we do when we develop a health issue? We focus on it till

we get ourselves discouraged. Let's be honest, it's easy to do. We haven't even talked about raising kids, jobs, and the list can go on and on. I was talking to a friend this week who was talking about buying their son his first car. The price of used cars is not the same when we, older people, bought our first car. Plus, he is paying for his daughter's education – is a freshman in college. I could tell by his voice; he was starting to get himself a little discouraged. Plus, his wife has to take care of her father because her mother passed away over the summer. They have a lot on their plate and it can be overwhelming at times. As Christians, we can become very discouraged by what we see on a daily basis or with what we have to face and deal with on a daily basis.

So, what do we do to change this discouragement to encouragement? Let's be honest, we don't like staying discouraged because it's not good for us. If we stay discouraged, it can cause severe health issues. AI tells us this about how discouragement affects the body: "When discouragement turns into long-term feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, or chronic stress, your brain signals your adrenal glands to release stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline. If these chemical levels stay elevated over time, they wear down your physical and mental well-being." Then it lists the health impacts of prolonged discouragement: mental health, immune health, heart health, digestive health, and sleep and energy health. So, think about this, if we had no discouragement in life, think how healthier we would be. So, we know discouragement over a long period of time will cause all kinds of issues down the road. To fight this, we have come up with the little things in life that give us short term encouragement. Think about it for a moment. When you get discouraged, what do you do to escape from it? Maybe you go to 7Brew and get an iced coffee. Maybe you go and read your favorite book or listen to your favorite song. Maybe you watch your favorite movie and TV show. Maybe you go to your favorite park. Maybe you go to your favorite hobby like cooking or gardening. We have a list of items we go to when we get discouraged because we don't like being discouraged – who does? I don't like being discouraged. The problem with these items is that they are only temporary. You can listen to your favorite song twenty times, yet you know your problems didn't go away. You can drink only so many iced coffees before they start causing

other health issues – like many bathroom trips or a caffeine high. You can read a good book and feel good after you are done, but when you wake up the next morning, that book has already started to fade from your memory. The problems of life are still there. In other words, the earthly things we look for to encourage us are only short lived. They are very temporary. I'm not saying they are bad. We need these things as long as they don't lead us to sin. We need these little things to help us deal with daily life. What I've found is that at times they are not enough. When life gets unbearable, these earthy things are so limited. They only go so far. Is there something out there that can give us better encouragement? Is there something better than an iced coffee or just reading our favorite book, even though they may help us in a very short term?

I read some Scripture last week that really reshaped my thinking on encouragement and I'm starting to rethink on my usual plan on encouraging myself when I'm discouraged. Let's turn to Haggai 1: 13-15, where we read this, “¹³ Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke ^Uby the commission of the LORD to the people, saying, “‘I am with you,’ declares the LORD.” ¹⁴ So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of armies, their God, ¹⁵ on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of Darius the king. (NASB – www.biblegateway.com)”

Haggai was a prophet commissioned by God to be His messenger to the Israelites who have returned to Jerusalem from captivity. They had started to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, which had been destroyed in 586 B.C. They started to rebuild the temple in 536 B.C., but they stopped in about 530 B.C. Haggai comes in about 520 B.C. so there has been no temple work for about ten years. So, we see here that Haggai tells the people that God is with them. You would think that would have been enough to encourage the people. However, we know from Numbers that God was with Israel in the wilderness before they came to the promise land and even when God was with them, all they did was complain and rebel against God. So, we know even if God is with us, we still can be

discouraged. Complaining is a byproduct of discouragement. So, God tells these Israelites who had stopped working on the Temple that He is with them because He wants them to finish the temple. God knows these words are not enough. So Scripture tells us that God “stirred” up the leaders and the people and they restarted the work on the temple. God had to “stir” up their spirit. The Hebrew term for the English term “stirred” means to awake, to be aroused (Strong’s Concordance). To be aroused here means to feel emotionally stirred up, waken from sleep. So, God had awakened the people and stirred them up emotionally so they could continue with the work on the temple. Why, because these people were always being discouraged by life’s events. They were always complaining because they were discouraged and we do the same at times as well. The Lord doesn’t stop here. Let’s go further and let’s read Haggai 2: 1-9, “**2** On the twenty-first of the seventh month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying, ² “Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, saying, ³ ‘Who is left among you who saw this ^[a]temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? ^[b]Does it not seem to you like nothing ^[c]in comparison? ⁴ But now ^[d]take courage, Zerubbabel,’ declares the LORD, ‘take courage also, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all you people of the land take courage,’ declares the LORD, ‘and work; for I am with you,’ declares the LORD of armies. ⁵ ‘As for the ^[e]promise which I ^[f]made you when you came out of Egypt, ^[g]My Spirit remains in your midst; do not fear!’ ⁶ For this is what the LORD of armies says: ‘Once more ^[h]in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land. ⁷ I will shake all the nations; and ^[i]they will come *with* the wealth of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the LORD of armies. ⁸ ‘The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine,’ declares the LORD of armies. ⁹ ‘The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,’ says the LORD of armies, ‘and in this place I will give peace,’ declares the LORD of armies.” (NASB – www.biblegateway.com)”

Now, the people are getting discouraged because the repaired temple is not looking like the temple during King Solomon’s day. They are discouraged because

they can't go back to the old glory of the temple. So, God tells them to take courage or be strong depending on your translation. The Hebrew term for courage or strong means strength, repair, encourage (Strong's Concordance). Not only has God stirred the Israelites emotionally through the Spirit, but now God is giving them strength and encouragement. When we get discouraged, we look outward for encouragement. As followers of Jesus, we must learn to look within. We have the same Holy Spirit within us that was sent by God to help those poor discouraged Israelites trying to rebuild a destroyed temple. We can go to 7Brew and get an ice coffee, but we must learn to pray to Jesus and ask Him for encouragement and strength before we get that iced coffee. Before we go to a counselor for encouragement, we should pray to Jesus for encouragement because He will tell the Holy Spirit to encourage us because He knows us better than we know ourselves and He knows us better than a counselor because we usually don't tell the counselor everything about ourselves and counselors are limited. The Holy Spirit is unlimited. God is supplying even encouragement to the Israelites and He can do the same for us. He knows what we need to encourage us better than what we think we know what will encourage us if that makes any sense.

When the Lord encourages, it's different. We'll know it's not something we did, but what He did and His encouragement lasts longer. In Isaiah 41: 10, we read, "Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. (NLT)" One of the ways He strengthens us is by encouraging us through His ways. I did put this to a test. I remembered to pray for encouragement while driving to work the other day because driving every day is really getting on my nerves. People are crazy today when driving is involved. I didn't get upset once during my drive back and forth from the park. I had the usually person go through a stop sign and a driver cut me off on Route 30. God gave me encouragement by giving me a different mindset while driving. This may sound weird to us, but this may go in line with what Paul talks about in Romans 12 about the "renewing of our minds" through Jesus. Sometimes we need "stirred up" and the Lord can do that to us by arousing

our mind by strengthening and encouraging us with good thoughts instead of negative thoughts. I believe we rely too much on earthly things to encourage us. We need to learn to pray more to Jesus and ask Him to encourage us as well by any method that He thinks is best for us – the Bible, other people, songs, different mindset, etc, etc. To be honest, when has been the last time we ask Jesus to encourage us? I believe we are missing one of the great blessings from God when we don't ask Him for encouragement. Let's start praying to Jesus and ask Him to encourage us. I leave you with these encouraging words from Isaiah 43: 1b – 2, "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. (NLT)"

NLT Life Application Study Bible. Tyndale House Publishers: Wheaton, 1996

The Strongest Strong's Concordance. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001