

Sermon Notes

(A basic transcription with modifications for style and clarity)

GODLY ENCOURAGEMENT

Marshall Stiver, April 29, 2023

There are a lot of elements that come into play as to why the world is in the shape that it is today. We know that the world is under the influence of Satan the devil. Therefore, we see all of the ugliness and all of the evil things coming out in various disheartening forms.

This world needs encouragement. You may be thinking that there are a lot of places where there is encouragement offered in the world today. If you listen to political talk, you'll hear, "We can turn this thing around. We can get together. We can get out the vote." Or "We simply play the political game better than the other side." Or "We've just got to get tougher. We can do it!" We've heard these things across both sides of the aisle.

In our personal lives, we might be encouraged by someone to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps; get up and show the world what you can do. There's nothing wrong with gumption but that's different when it comes down to just what you can do. And maybe we've encouraged someone in the same way at some point.

That's a common form of encouragement but it is also an arrogant form.

James 4:13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"—

14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."

16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

Looking back at verse 14 a common attitude that we might see today is,. Why should we work at all? If our life is just a vapor and it's all going to be gone, why work? Let somebody else do it." But we know it is a godly ethic to work. It's a good ethic and it is one that God has. Christ and the Father work and so do we.

From 1 Timothy 5:8, we know that a man is less than an unbeliever in God's eyes if he doesn't provide for his family if he is able. And we know there are extenuating circumstances to where that can't happen. That's understandable.

But the point that James is making is that in our eagerness to work and to provide and to make money, we must humbly look to our God for wisdom, for direction, for guidance, and for His blessing not our own.

James is saying that to leave God out of the picture is the height of arrogance. The world we live in today is at the height of arrogance.

We don't need encouragement to solve cultural, financial, or personal challenges through our own reasoning. That is just automatic for us. We need godly encouragement, not Satan's. Satan has a counterfeit for everything.

Ephesians 6:11 ESV Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

We may think some people are our enemies because of their evil intentions toward us. But the true nature of our struggle is spiritual. So, we need encouragement to trust God only and to resist this world's encouragement which is to trust in ourselves. Do what you believe, do what you think is best.

In Acts 4 we're going to read about an individual who is known for his encouragement to others.

Acts 4:36 ESV Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus,

Barnabas's name before conversion was Joseph or as some translations will say is Joses. But as his fruits began to show, the apostles could see what he was developing into, they saw his talents and his gift for encouragement. Some translations say, "son of consolation", "son of exhortation". They come from the same Greek word.

Encouragement is a word we're very accustomed to in the English language. It is translated from the Greek, *paraklesis* and it means comfort, consolation, exhortation, and entreaty. Let's get a fuller picture of this with a brief description of each one of those words.

- a. Comfort is the easing of a person's feelings of grief or distress.
- b. Consolation is the comfort received by a person after a loss or disappointment.
- c. Exhortation is communication emphatically urging somebody to do something, to get it under control.
- d. Entreaty is an earnest or humble request.

These words define godly encouragement. There is a lot of depth to it. Acts 8 gives an example of where encouragement was desperately needed.

Acts 8:1 ESV And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

2 Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him.

3 But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

Brethren fled for their lives. They left Jerusalem in droves because of this persecution. They were instantly uprooted. How did they take care of their possessions? It was a horrible situation. It was a huge trial. And Saul was at the heart of all this terror at that time. Their faith was being tested to its depths.

Acts 11:19 ESV Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews.

20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus.

21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

22 The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

23 When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose,

Barnabas traveled to exhort the scattered brethren. Exhorting is a part of encouragement and he communicated emphatically, urging them to remain steadfast and faithful to God. That was his exhortation to them.

Just last Sabbath we heard an entire message on that very thing. Scripture after scripture showing what God's view of each of His children is no matter what the circumstance, no matter what the trial.. That's one of the faces of encouragement.

The early Church, at this time, was facing persecution. It's very relevant to us as we enter into the days that we're getting into now. Barnabas could have quoted Christ's own words to them. Christ said:

John 15:18 "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.

19 If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

Being persecuted for your faith in God is proof positive that God has selected you, that you are truly one of His dearest people in His mind because you have been called. You are distinct in all of the world.

Christ meant this as encouragement. It's hard for us to fathom because we have come from such a soft, spoiled culture. This is great encouragement from Jesus Christ. It proves that God has set us apart. We're different. We're special in His eyes.

Barnabas could have reminded them too that before Christ's second coming that Christ warned that a time of tribulation would come such as the world has never seen. And that unless those days were cut short, all life would be wiped out by war, virtually all life. And yet, Christ went on to say, "But for the sake of the faithful, those days would be cut short."

It points again to the fact that we are in God's hands, and we have no reason to fear in the face of the potential future. The point is that caving into persecution and turning away from God is to embrace a way of life that only ends in death.

That is what the world encourages. One of the things we hear a lot is, you've got to vote for the right person. Somebody else will say you've got to store up food and you need to store up ammunition. And you should be purchasing a gun of some sort. That's worldly encouragement. Every worldly form of encouragement does not point us to confidence in God but rather to confidence in self. That's why it's not godly. Christ's encouragement to His people is strong meat. We have to consider the two ends we could come to now and in the future as well.

All the faithful in Hebrews 11 who await the resurrection, would have been encouraged to stay the course in their time as well. There were those who were speaking the same words to them, and their future is set. Their future is sure. The same is true for us today. Barnabas encouraged the faithful to be steadfast in God. To cling to Him, to cleave to Him.

Acts 11:24 ESV for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.

These are very good words, that Barnabas was a good man. That means that he was a changed man. At the point of his baptism he began a definite change. He made a turn from the man he had been. He was changing and he was genuine. He was developing the heart and mind of God.

There is an unwritten aspect to this man that should be acknowledged for our benefit. One we desperately don't want to overlook. To be full of the Holy Spirit and of faith means one thing. It means he wasn't full of himself.. If we want to be full of the Holy Spirit and faith we have to shrink down in our own eyes. He was a humble man. Valuable information for us to have in the back of our mind.

In the previous verses that we just read, we saw that various other men had been preaching the truth there. Some were those who had fled persecution in the first place and had been preaching and others had been added. And many had been called through them. Upon seeing that they were progressing well under the guidance of others, he encouraged them to stay the course within God's Church.

And why does that stand out to us today? There was no competition or division and God blessed them with even more growth. This resonates in our minds because of the times that we're living in.

Humble people learn to look to God alone and they are easily led by the Holy Spirit increasingly. It's as if the smaller we get in our own eyes, the more easily we're led, the greater our faith, the more we're able to help others. That's how they are able to encourage others to the same end. Additionally, the humble are easily encouraged by God. Because they're not looking to themselves. They're looking to Him.

Let's look at Stephan's example in Acts 7:

Acts 7:54–55 ESV Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him.

55 But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

It's interesting that Barnabas and Stephen have both been said to be full of the Holy Spirit. Neither one of these fellows were full of themselves. They were looking to God.

56 And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

57 But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him.

58 Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.

59 And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

60 And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

God gave this man who was full of faith and the Holy Spirit, what he needed when the end was upon him. And, in fact, his last words are very much reflected in the last words of Jesus Christ.

When we look at the bigger picture we see encouragement. And this is encouragement in the strong meat category. We see encouragement in the transformation of the human mind and the character of this individual. He was a very changed man.

Now let's get back to Barnabas. Remember from chapter 8 that Saul was ravaging the Church and dragging men and women off to prison. Now we read about Saul's miraculous conversion.

Acts 9:26 And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.

We can understand their thinking at that point. Saul might have been the reason that some lost a loved one or loved ones. What they needed was comfort. Remember that comfort is the easing of a person's feelings of grief and distress. And it is described as one of the elements of encouragement. How did Barnabas encourage these people?

27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

What is he doing? He was doing the very same thing he had done when Saul was persecuting the Church. He's pointed them to complete confidence in God and not in their own reasoning. God had miraculously called the persecutor, and the persecutor, their new brother in Christ, had whole heartedly yielded himself to God's service. Barnabas comforted them with the truth. Godly encouragement is spiritually healing. It's a powerful thing. It's spiritually healing.

28 So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.

29 And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him.

30 And when the brothers (the brethren there) learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

This is an incredible change of events. Saul has gone from Saul to Paul essentially and he's gone from enemy to now a beloved family member. Now the brethren are watching out for him, taking care of him. That represents a reconciling and a healing within the Church. All of this through the right kind of encouragement.

31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

So, what's the big picture after this particular juncture? The Church as a whole and its individual members are built up wherever godly encouragement is practiced. We're concerned about that today, the Church being built up and strengthened. Godly encouragement is the thing that is needed.

Another element within encouragement that of consolation, which means the comfort received by a person after a loss or disappointment.

In Act 13, the Holy Spirit has directed Paul and Barnabas to sail to Cyprus to preach the truth. They have taken along with them John Mark to be their assistant in this venture.

Acts 13:13 ESV Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem,

We know that Paul and Barnabas experienced some dangerous things while they were there. It isn't clear exactly why John Mark left them, but he did. Sometime later, they see John again. They saw him again in Antioch.

Acts 15:36 ESV And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are."

37 Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark.

38 But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.

39 And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus,

40 but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.

This is a difficult situation and it can arise within God's Church from time to time. Paul and Barnabas are at odds with each other. They are at opposite ends in this particular matter. We see that the brethren there commended Paul and Silas by prayer to God as if that was an endorsement of them. It doesn't say that they did or did not do the same with Barnabas and John Mark.

The one thing that we can know for sure is that Luke wrote the book of Acts, and he is traveling with Paul and Silas. So, at this point, Luke has no first-hand knowledge of what Barnabas and John might do other than where they were headed.

Aside from that, what would have induced Barnabas to desire so strongly to take his cousin along to the work? Was it just because he was a relative? Was he prideful about it? Or He wanted to have more of his family involved in the work. That's a possibility.

Or could it have been because he knew this man, his cousin, better than any others. He knew him at a deeper level. Maybe he saw in John Mark a deeply repentant man in need of the encouragement of a second chance. That's very possible. That's a simple concept to relate to because we've all been there. Depending on what it is we experience, we can

almost feel internal pain over it. Symbolically ache for a have a chance to do it right the next time.

We do know that John Mark would have been very disappointed in his own failure. We can verify that by his forthcoming fruits. And we do know that Barnabas was of a mind to offer consolation. You can almost hear him consoling with the same words of truth. Perhaps John Mark was fearful of the dangers that he saw while he was there with Paul and Barnabas. He would have been encouraged, undoubtedly by his cousin, Barnabas, to consider the truth that's found in Isaiah 41.

Isaiah 41:8 ESV But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend;

This young man would have been reminded that he was a part of spiritual Israel. Not just by physical blood.

9 you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, "You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off"; (I haven't gotten rid of you.)

10 fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

The Holy Spirit would lead us to reinforced over and over in his mind that God was his strength and not he himself. His cousin would have reinforced that to him. Any fears could be overcome through faith. Such encouragement would help to build up this young man eventually into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, which is where we're all headed. He needed a second chance. That's how encouragement works. We follow this history just a little bit farther when Paul references both Mark and Barnabas:

Colossians 4:10 ESV Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him),

Paul acknowledges in this letter that he and Mark had fully reconciled. There's been a spiritual healing. It's done publicly through his letter which had to be an encouragement to everybody who read it. This was uplifting.

Near the end of Paul's life He mentions Mark again:

2 Timothy 4:9 ESV Do your best to come to me soon.

10 For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.

As you think about this whole story flow it's interesting that Demas possibly left for the very same reason that John Mark did originally, physical danger. For anyone to stay with Paul at this point could potentially subject them to martyrdom or to imprisonment.

The thing is, Mark was the man that Paul believed would come to him. Paul was in a very lonely place at this point, isolated. He really needed encouragement much as Christ sought the encouragement of His disciples just before His death. He prayed in Gethsemane and asked, "Can you stay awake with Me while I'm in this condition."

So, the encouragement of Barnabas to Mark very likely translated into Paul receiving Mark's encouragement before he died. What we do know about Paul was that he was faithful to the end, he fought the good fight, he met the end and that's what God desires in each one of us. We desire the very same thing.

All of this works together with godly encouragement. That's how we make it through the phases that we experience, through the trials, through the tests. We realize we're all destined to become sons or daughters of encouragement. That's what we are to be.

Romans 15:1 ESV We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

Paul points out that we're all at different levels of understanding and different levels of spiritual development faith. We have to get smaller in our own eyes to increase the faith.

In chapter 14. he spoke of how some believed they could eat only vegetables and not meat. Some would esteem one day above another. They weren't all on the same page about everything. These individuals were the ones who hadn't yet fully comprehended what they could and couldn't do and they didn't want to violate their conscience.

We can relate to this so easily. Decades ago we kept Pentecost on a Monday, although there were some that thought it was supposed to be on a Sunday at that time. We did it for decades. The fact is it did cause some consternation within the Church. But no one needed to cancel anyone over it because God is able to make the weak stand. And that's what he says here in this chapter. But Paul is instructing that those who are stronger in the faith ought to soberly consider how their conduct over such matters will affect the weaker brethren. Those who haven't gotten to the point that they are yet.

2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

We are to be very gentle in matters in which their spiritual edification is concerned, their spiritual understanding. We are to indulge their ignorance and their weakness just as others had to with us previously. None of us came into God's Church knowing everything, having the same depth of conversion that we have today.

I am not talking about someone teaching doctrinal error. That's not the issue. I am talking about people not yet knowing fully. Just immature in the faith. That's what's being discussed. In thinking back to John Mark, he had to be given a chance to grow, and God was able to make him stand. We are to encourage the weaker among us as well. A very valuable lesson for us.

We can't encourage if we're going to be hard. What we're talking about is the opposite of cancel culture where you get cut off at the knees at the first look. You're not like me. You're out of here. You're gone.

3 For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me."

4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

5 May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus,

We are to endure, and we are to encourage each other just as Christ has done and is doing with us to this day. And why?

6 that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Godly encouragement to each other helps us to be of one voice because it points us to God. It doesn't point us to our own opinions. The things that seem keen and right to us, it points us to God so that we come out as one and we can glorify God. So, godly encouragement unifies us and it's a trait of the God Family.

Paul also speaks about spiritual gifts:

1 Corinthians 12:4 ESV Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;

All of the gifts that Paul is referring to are the gifts of the Holy Spirit and they are a result of yielding ourselves to that Holy Spirit. What does that look like to yield ourselves to the Holy Spirit? It means believing God on virtually any subject. Subjects that we have different opinions about maybe. Different opinions than God that we've had in the past. Areas where we may have failed on a spiritual level previously just like with John Mark.

But when we come to that point where we believe God on virtually every subject that's what yielding to the Holy Spirit looks like. That's what we're aiming for. The Holy Spirit is powerful in a faithful mind, one that resists the world's encouragement to trust our own reasoning.

A faithful mind is fertile ground for a gift given through the Holy Spirit. That's what will make it grow. And these gifts have a perfect purpose.

7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit (in other words, these gifts) for the common good.

The gifts were given to build up the Church of God. They're given to make it spiritually healthy so that we can, by God's power in us, resist the pulls and the deceptions of this world as one body working in unison.

25 that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

We are given gifts by God to get rid of divisions and to heal breaches within the Church. I know our minds go to the same spot automatically when we read something like this, or when we discuss it. We think about it. It goes to the present distress that is within the Church of God.

Don't let your mind get overwhelmed or side-tracked. God's apostle is talking about the solution to division. Today, we're talking about the gift of encouragement. We reflect back again on John Mark. He was pulled up out of a spiritual pit through encouragement. He was then able to extend that encouragement to others where there had once been a breach and now there was a healing. That's how this works.

You or me worrying or whining about division is as useless as anything can be. That is what comes from the encouragement of the world. It encourages us to solve problems according to the reasoning that's in our own minds. It's so easy to let our faith go to what comes out of our own mind apart from God.

We know that our solutions come through faith in God.

Hebrews 10:19 ESV Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,

20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,

21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God,

22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

Very encouraging words for us especially this time of year just having come through the spring Holy Days. We know that a great spiritual door has been opened to us by Jesus Christ. Through it, we have direct access to God our Father at any time. We have access to all promises that He has made and makes to His people. We know it is impossible for God to lie (Hebrews 6:18). So, we can draw near to God in full faith in His promises of our future. We have a tremendous, tremendous future ahead of us.

We know that upon genuine repentance we can be made clean until the day our change comes. In other words, until the day of our resurrection. We can be overcoming and be made clean continuously throughout our lives. We know that God will give us the power to go on to perfection. These mortal bodies will become immortal ones. We'll have energy, we'll have drive, we'll have zeal and we'll be able to help retrain mankind in the

millennium and in the Great White Throne Judgment. We'll see God's family and government grow and grow. And there will be peace and happiness everywhere.

We have a full assurance of these things and so much more. Why does Paul remind us of so much positive truth? It's because of the gravity of falling short. We have so much going for us but there is so much gravity in what can happen.

26 For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

27 but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

The rest of the verses to the end of the chapter all compound this same concept.

39 But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

This is who we are as God's people. This statement brings into much sharper focus the two verses that we skipped over:

24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,

We are to be actively considering, thinking deeply about each other. How we can be of help, how we can be of encouragement. In Philippians 2:4, Paul instructed that we not only look to our own affairs but for the affairs of others. To help each other. We are to think as deeply about others as we do ourselves. We know that in our own lives we have our own strengths, we have our own trials, our own difficulties, our own weaknesses. And so do our brothers and sisters in Christ.

How can we help stir up our brothers and sisters to love and good works? That's what we have to be thinking about. We are of those who do these things. Paul reaffirmed it. We know it's true and we need to be encouraged to be that way because that's who we are. That's what we've been called to.

25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

The only way to apply these things that we've thought deeply on through the week is to assemble together on the Sabbath. Otherwise of what value is it for us to think deeply on these things, to consider them, our brothers, and sisters? And the purpose of getting together is so that we can use the gift of encouragement. That's the thing that creates unity. That's a powerful tool of unity within the Church that we've been give through the power of God's Holy Spirit working in us.

When we get to services as early as we can and we stay as late as we can we're saying to those around us, "You matter to me. I couldn't wait to get here to see you. I hate to leave now because I've got to go home." "I care about you." It's just like with our own

children, time matters to them. It says, "I love you." When we spend time with our kids they know we love them and that's the same with each one of us.

Then we should ask ourselves another question, very vital concerning Church unity. Do we get together with God's people in other groups from time to time? Do we? Well, we should, absolutely. What we are talking about among ourselves, it says the same things to our brothers and sisters in other organizations. It's encouraging and it creates an atmosphere for reconciling and an atmosphere for healing. Not instantaneously but obviously these things are progressive. Encouragement is a progressive thing, and it produces fruit. Christ adds to this line of thought:

John 15:12 ESV "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. (This is a commandment. Mutual love is the commandment.)

14 You are my friends if you do what I command you.

If we obey that command to love one another, then we are His friends. To do that, we have to spend time together and talk. We have Christ's example here.

15 No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

Christ talks to His friends about the things He's heard from our Father. He communicates. In other words, He's encouraging each one of us to look to our Father in implicit faith. He's pointing back to His Father. You can learn from Him too. With implicit faith we can get the answers we need in dealing with cultural problems, financial, personal, whatever difficulty it is that we're facing. It could be anything. Christ is our example and we, therefore, are of those who employ His examples.

Isaiah 50:4 ESV The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught.

5 The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward.

Like Christ, our Father can give us the inspiration. The inspiration that we need to speak faithfully and true to someone who is weary, who is heavy-laden, who's burdened with some kind of a trial, whether it's a sin, whatever it might be, and we can give them help.

We wake morning by morning. And if we're leadable, God can help us consider our spiritual family in terms of how we can stir up love and good works. When our ears are opened to Him (to our Father), we reject every impulse to offer worldly encouragement, which is worthless, He'll give us the wisdom and the desire to speak true encouragement. The encouragement that brings unity in life.

Philippians 4:11 ESV Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.

12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

We can encourage each other in the very same way with these words. If somebody is really struggling we can say, "It's true, we can do all things through Him. We can't do it of ourselves." We have to point each other back to the source of our power, to our God. We could say, "I Struggle too" because we all do. God has helped me through many trials. He will help you too." "I'm praying for you,"

We can share miracles that have occurred in our life. Strides we've made in our life in overcoming. We can share them with each other and encourage each other through that means because God's Spirit is powerful, and we need to encourage each other in that way. We need to be very sensitive to the Spirit's lead in how we encourage. There's a right and a wrong way.

Proverbs 25:11 ESV A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.

It's a very beautiful picture. I want to share with you a beautiful description of that phrase "a word fitly spoken." It comes from Clark's commentary.

"An observation, caution, reproof, or advice, that comes in naturally, runs smoothly along, is not forced or dragged in, that appears to be without design, to rise out of the conversation, and though particularly relative to one point, will appear to the company to suit all."

You think about those words. That's beautifully said. But there is another half to considering one another in order to stir up love and good works. We must be sensitive in how we receive the godly encouragement that we're given by others. We're going to give it and we're going to receive godly encouragement.

12 Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold is a wise reprovor to a listening ear.

Speaking and listening are equal elements in godly encouragement. I'm going to let the Apostle Paul conclude for us because he does it so beautifully in what he has said here. Let's go to 1 Thessalonians 5 and beginning in verse 1.

1 Thessalonians 5:1 ESV Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you.

2 For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

3 While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

4 But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.

5 For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.

6 So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.

7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night.

8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

9 For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

10 who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.

11 Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.