

Encouragement

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Date: 28 November 2021

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[0 : 00] As we think about encouragement, there has been a child that has been forgotten for Christmas. It is the ultimate. This child will go without a present unless the courageous Arthur Christmas gets to them with that gift before the sun rises and the child wakes. He takes with him his ace specialist wrapping elf. That's a wrapping elf, not a wrapping elf. And who discovers then that they need to make this courageous journey together and encourage each other on. They're up against it. They risk everything to share the gift. The gift arrives. No one is disappointed.

That's why we're here at Advent. The gift is about to arrive and nobody will be disappointed because Jesus, our Saviour, our King, is expected. And we look forward with encouragement and expectation.

In our reading this morning, Paul is writing to the church in Thessalonica. They are a people Paul had invested much in, in his early travels and in his church. And the encouragement was two-way. He was encouraging them and building them up. He had sent people. He had sent Timothy. He had sent others. And this encouragement was going backwards and forwards as they built each other up. Timothy had brought back good news to Paul. Yet there were some aspects of this newly emerging church, as we would know as church, that needed a little bit of extra encouragement and tweaking as they considered themselves and looked at their gifting and how that should be lived out in the life of the church. The dictionary definition of encouragement is the action of giving someone support, confidence, and hope. And in Paul's letter to them this morning, in this section, there is a lot of that in there.

And as a Christian context, we are there to motivate, to inspire, to encourage, to console others, so that we can mature in our walk with Jesus and bring new life and hope in the power of the Holy Spirit.

[2 : 29] That is what we are about. That is the encouragement. And this gift, this gift is so important. If you're looking for a gift this Christmas, and I guess people are looking around, if you're looking for a spiritual gift, encouragement is a great one to have. Encouragement, it's easy to carry.

It's easy to give away. It doesn't need wrapping up in lots of fluffy words. It can be given as it is, raw and lovingly. It can be given in every season, not just at Christmas. It's a gift that just keeps on giving. It multiplies as we encourage others and build each other up in the faith. It's not cheap.

It's not a throwaway item. It's given because it's given with a purpose. It's given and shared, and it often, often lasts a lifetime. And you, as well as I, will remember those things where people have encouraged us, maybe in our childhood, that is stuck and is grown and is for us to share.

I can think of words and encouragement. I'm sure you can. And it's encouraging the person that we give it to, to be all that God can be and be themselves in that. What better gift to give at Christmas and in Advent? You may already have this gift. You may already have it in being generous, in kind, in listening to others, helping people move from pessimism to optimism. Maybe, again, you love people and treat them with sensitivity and with patience, because that's a large part of what encouragement is, is bearing with one another. And as Paul says, what would be an adequate thanksgiving to offer God for all the joy we experience before him because of you. Imagine that, having spoken into your life.

And he continues, we do what we can, praying away night and day, asking for the bonus of seeing your faces again and doing what we can to help you when your faith falters.

[4 : 55] I'm here to encourage you and support you, says Paul. He's here to encourage and build up a people.

And in his first letter, he's already said to them, therefore, encourage one another and build each other up. Maybe you can think of areas now where somebody has done that for you and where you

could do that for others more and more. This new church, moving in the power of the Holy Spirit, knows the power of encouragement right from the beginning. They know what it means to be encouraged, and because of that, they've experienced it and they're living it. I believe that every Christian should ask for the gift of encouragement. Why? Because we need it. We need encouragement in every aspect of our lives.

Imagine if you've just read Paul's letter for the first time, and it was written to you specifically. Maybe you want to go away and read that again this morning. Because we all know just a few things that he says in there. Yeah, you need to modify your life in this little bit. But it's an encouragement to do it, because out of that comes great things. And he goes on to say, we all know those things, perhaps. But then he says, may God our Father himself and our Master Jesus clear the road to you. Clear the road. And may the Master pour on you the love, so it fills your life and splashes over into everyone around you. I love that analogy in the message, that it splashes into other people's lives. It's not planted. It's not specifically done with an agenda. It just splashes out. And people catch it. And they're enthused and encouraged. My encouragement to you this first Sunday in Advent, and as we prepare our hearts and lives for Jesus, to search our hearts and be ready for his coming again, and all the fullness that he has. How will you encourage others to walk with Jesus? How will you use that love as he pours that into your life, and it splashes out into others? And they are soaked in encouragement. You see, we need to flex our encouraging muscles as Christians more and more.

Encouragement is powerful. It changes lives. It opens up possibilities. It lifts people out of darkness. Literally, it lifts people out of darkness. Who is worthy of our encouragement? Often it's born out of an attitude of gratitude in the large and small things of life. Encourage the person who serves you at the shop. What does that take? I heard somebody the other day who works in retail, and somebody had taken the time to go to their manager and tell them what an amazing experience they'd had, and what a difference that that had made to them, just to hear that in this busy moment. Maybe you're up early enough in the morning to catch those recycling people who come past your house, just to go out and encourage them, and thank them for what they do.

[8 : 37] I'll finish with a story that impacted my life from many, many years ago, and it started with a can of cola. Other brands of encouragement are available.

Mike Pilavachi told a story many years ago at New Wine, and it was in the days of he parked his car in a multi-story car park, and every day he had to come out. It was in the days of when you had somebody sat at the barrier. Maybe you remember those days. And each day he'd get to the barrier, and there was this man for whom looked as though there had been no joy in his life for a long, long, long time.

He just took the money, handed back any change, and that was it. Mike thought, how can I encourage him in what he is doing in his job and in his life? It was a hot summer, so every day Mike went out and chilled down a bottle, a can of cola. The first day he handed over his money, and I handed over a can of cola. No eye contact at all, nothing whatsoever. Second day, money over, can of cold coke, nothing at all. Third day, money over, and there was this sense in this guy of, what is this about? The fourth day, there's a smile as he meets Mike, who hands over and his ice-cold can of coke. The fifth day, the barrier doesn't go up. Takes the money with this huge beaming smile, and he said, why are you doing this? He said, not even my boss does anything like this for me. Mike said, I just want to do this to encourage you day by day in what you do. I think the cue must have been huge trying to get out of that multi-story car park as they talk to each other about encouragement day in and day out. Whatever the Lord is going to use in your life to encourage other people, I pray that he will bless you this Advent, that you will know that gifting that he has given to us that we can share with other people. And may, I pray, it splash into other people's lives so that they are soaked in the encouragement and love of Jesus.