

# Choose to Encourage

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Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

[ 0 : 00 ] Father, thank you that your son has overcome the world. Thank you that we can take courage in him. Thank you, Father, that we can pray to you in the name of Jesus.

Thank you, Father, that for us who are in Jesus, that you love us, that you care for us, that we can share in Jesus's triumph.

We ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would gently but deeply work in us, a work of healing in our body, a work of healing in our soul, a work of healing in our spirit, so that we might be encouraged by the gospel and learn to encourage others to their good and your great glory.

This we ask in Jesus's name, your son and our savior. Amen. Please be seated. I don't want to worry you. I know how congregations can get very worried when the minister does something out of the usual.

I'm going to begin my sermon here and then I'm going to move to up there. And the reason is obvious because I have to watch the screen for the first couple of minutes. If you saw in the bulletin, the theme, the title of the sermon today is Choose Encouragement or Choose to Encourage.

[ 1 : 11 ] And those of you who know me know that I'm a little bit weak in the gift of encouragement. And so I actually thought I would go to the Internet to get some resources to encourage you.

So maybe what we'll just do is we'll look at these different images and then I'll just say amen and then we'll move on. But maybe we'll need to actually open the word. So these are some of the posters and sayings that I found to encourage you this morning.

Uh-oh, maybe the screen. Oh, there it is. Just because you've always done it that way doesn't mean it's not incredibly stupid. It could be that the purpose of your life is only to serve as a warning to others.

That's a ship sinking. That's a bike flying off a cliff if you can't see it from the back. Keep living life like there's no tomorrow and you'll be right sooner than you think.

When people are free to do as they please, they usually imitate each other. Hipsters, take note. There you go. Looking sharp is easy when you haven't done any work.

[ 2 : 17 ] Some of you might want to take that to your office. That's somebody climbing up a steep hill. I expected times like this but never thought they'd be so bad, so long, and so frequent.

There we go. There we go. There's somebody losing their surfing board there if you can see that. When good fortune often eludes you, this kind never misses. There you go.

Big winners. Because nothing says you're a loser more than owning a motivational poster about being a winner. There's a bear about to eat a fish climbing the rapids.

The journey of a thousand miles sometimes ends very, very badly. So I hope you all feel deeply encouraged by those particular posters.

And I hope I didn't offend anybody here who happens to have a poster that says winner in your house or in your office. So I hope I didn't offend you by that.

[ 3 : 23 ] But here's the thing. Actually, I think I can say this. Andrew, who looked up the images for me, I gave him the ones I wanted. And he actually, I mean, some of you probably work in offices where people are always putting posters like that or telling you these little, you know, normally would say ambition and something else about how you just have to dream big or think big or whatever.

And you'll succeed. And so many of us sort of labor under those types of encouragement. Here's the problem with some of this stuff. As we all know, that's why we can relate to this.

On one hand, we do know that sometimes we need encouragement, we need hope. We're in difficult situations. And I don't want to start to undermine that, especially things that happen to work for you.

But the problem with a lot of encouragement and a lot of motivation is that, first of all, posters like that, if they said the normal thing you'd see in the doctor's office or maybe where you work, is that they often just seem to be there to manipulate you.

They're just there to manipulate you. And it's as if people will say, you know, you're the most valued employee we have.

[ 4 : 38 ] What you're doing is unbelievably important. And then the next day they lay you off. Or that there's things going on in your workplace. And rather than the employers wanting to hear some helpful comments or feedback, they use posters or sayings like this to try to silence things, silence the people who have some insight about problems, silence bad things that are going on.

And so often these words of encouragement or these types of posters are used to manipulate, to ignore problems, or to try to tell us something which just isn't true.

And so while on one hand, some of us have a bit of a, I mean, we like the pictures of some of them and we hope that the sentiments or the cliches are true, but at the same time we also sort of know that there's just something not quite right with it.

When I was in university, one of my friends, his mother went in for some simple surgery. She was going to be, she had to be put out for it.

And, you know, of course we're all, I wasn't, but, you know, everybody was telling him how it's all going to work out good, et cetera, et cetera. And, you know, I don't know what the statistics are for this particular surgery.

[ 5 : 54 ] Maybe it is that only like, you know, 0.0001% of people who go through this surgery have serious complications that lead to your death. But for my friend's mother, she was that 0.0001%.

And in something which should have been very routine, she died on the operating table. And it was very, very, very devastating, as you can imagine, to my friend and to all the other people who'd been just so glibly telling him that everything was going to be great and perfect and work out.

And so we all know, on one hand, we want sort of the Disney view of the world to be true. But at another level, we know that the Disney view of the world is not true.

And often when Christians want to try to help each other learn how to encourage, we revert, not to John Paul Sartre, who Jeremiah was talking about earlier, but we revert to Disney and motivational posters.

So we, as Christians, were a little bit caught. If you listened to Helen speak earlier, when she was reading from 1 Thessalonians 5, and that's what we're going to be looking at. Hopefully you can get your Bibles out and turn in them to 1 Thessalonians 5, verses 9 and following.

[ 7 : 08 ] The Bible here very clearly tells us that we have to encourage one another. But on the other hand, we might not always really know how to do it because our right-handedness of encouragement is to go into the Disney world and to motivational posters.

So let's actually, what we're going to do, if Andrew, if you could put the Bible text up, what we're going to do is we're going to read the text together that we're going to look at.

If you look in the bulletin in the pastor's blog, I lay out how we're going to spend eight weeks on 1 Thessalonians 5, 9 to 28, looking at different exhortations there.

And today we're just looking at the first exhortation, which is to encourage. And so why don't you join with me in reading this text? Here's what this text, here's the first thing that this text is bringing home to us.

Through the cross of Christ, God knows me perfectly and still offers me a salvation which is immediate, complete, full, whole, eternal, and irrevocable.

[ 8 : 35 ] That's what this text of Scripture is teaching me and teaching us, that through the cross of Christ, God knows me perfectly and still offers me a salvation which is immediate, complete, full, whole, eternal, and irrevocable.

It's really, really quite amazing. This book that we're going to be spending eight weeks in, Thessalonica was the second city in Europe, the second place in Europe to have the Christian faith come.

And if you go back later on and you read Acts chapter 16 and Acts chapter 17, you'll see an historical account of something momentous. The Christian faith didn't enter Europe with armies. It didn't enter Europe with thousands and thousands of people flooding to do all sorts of remarkable, amazing things. It didn't enter with all sorts of technology and wealth.

There were three or four guys who got off a boat in Philippi, and as their feet touch the ground, as described in Acts chapter 16, the first Christians enter Europe.

[ 9 : 47 ] And the first person to respond to the Christian faith is a woman by the name of Lydia. And she becomes the first European Christian. And if you read Acts 16, you'll see that things go badly for Paul.

I mean, he ends up leaving a small church, but he's beaten with rods, thrown in jail. God does something miraculous. And Paul and his small missionary team go to their next city, and the next city down the road is Thessalonica.

And Paul starts to speak about Jesus in Thessalonica. And first he speaks to Jewish people. And then as a result of his sharing about Jesus, three groups of people, ordinary people from three types of groups respond to the gospel and become followers of Jesus.

People who are Jewish, pagans who had become Jewish. So they've taken the trip from paganism to Judaism, but now they take another step and become Christians.

And the third group are people who were pagans and hadn't become Jews first. And these three different groups are part of this very, very early church in Thessalonica. And then a great persecution comes upon the church in Thessalonica and upon Paul once again.

[ 11 : 05 ] And after some things he has to leave. And when we read 1 Thessalonians, what we're reading is a copy of a letter that Paul wrote, probably about 17 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

It's one of the first parts in the New Testament that were written. And about 17 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, Paul, just a few months after he's left Thessalonica, sends a letter to the Thessalonians, to the church, to talk to them about important things to do with the Christian faith. And one of the things that all three of those groups had in common, whether it's the Judaism as it was practiced at that time, or whether it was pagans who had become Jewish, or whether it was pagans, is that their mindset was influenced, they were basically practicing different forms of what I call common human religion.

And in common human religion, basically, you do more good things than bad things.

And, or maybe the weight of certain good things are enough to outweigh a lot of small bad things.

Maybe one, you know, one afternoon spent, you know, with your, with your father-in-law, who's really grumpy and mean, outweighs the fact that you cheated on your taxes, and you've been telling a whole pile of small lies to your, your girlfriend or your wife.

[ 12 : 38 ] So, it doesn't necessarily mean you do more good things than bad things, because, you know, and we all like to sort of inflate the weight, so to speak, of our good things, and under-inflate the weight of our bad things.

But at the end of the day, common human religion is that if you do more good things than bad things, or the weight of your good things outweigh the bad things, then God, in a sense, has an obligation to you, to put you in a better place when you die.

And, and so maybe those good things will involve making a trip to Mecca, and keeping Ramadan. Maybe those good things will involve learning how, the 39 articles, and how to do traditional Anglicanism.

Maybe it will involve spending time in church on a Sunday morning, when it's sunny outside, and you could be doing something different. Maybe it's having a bar mitzvah.

Maybe it's learning spells. Maybe it's learning spells and voting NDP. Like, whatever it is. No, I just say, like, you know, whatever it is.

[ 13 : 37 ] Whether it's, like, whatever we would call New Age, or whether it's Hindu, or whether it's Buddhist, that there's this common human religion, that if you do more good things than bad things, that God has an obligation to you, to, to, to send you to a better place when you die.

And, the amazing thing about Jesus, is that Jesus, Jesus, and the message of Jesus, does not fit into any, it does not fit into the common human religion. And, and the fact of the matter is, is that we are naturally drawn to common human religion.

Actually, what we have is, we have a love-hate relationship, with common human religion. At certain times in our life, maybe, we, we sort of have a, a, a drawing to it, and doing more good things than bad things.

And, and others of us respond, maybe by just, throwing up our hands at any of that, and just say, you know what, when you die, that's it, let's have a beer. Or, you know, when you die, that's it, let's

make some money, have some fun, and then you die, that's it.

And so, some people tend to just, throw their, turn their back on common human religion, some sort of keep their foot in the door with it, some completely and utterly embrace it. But, the gospel is completely and utterly different.

[ 14 : 46 ] The gospel says, that God is never in our debt. Never, ever, ever, ever in our debt. And the remarkable thing, is that Jesus, by his death upon the cross, when Jesus looks at you, and looks at me, when he thinks of you, and thinks of me, he knows every single thing there is to know about us, and still he dies for us.

And that when he dies upon the cross, he doesn't just die for the me that's lived, from when I was born to now, and deals with the things that I've done in my life, from the time I was born to now, but he sees the entire length of my life.

He sees me from the moment of my conception, to the moment of my death. He sees me in all of my depth, in all of my angularity, in all of my particularity, and seeing all that there is to see, to know, to know about me.

He dies, he takes my place, that full place, and dies upon the cross for me. And so that in the gospel, God offers something to us, that we can never possibly accomplish by ourselves.

Because the gospel says, we delude ourselves to think, that we can ever, ever possibly put the living God in our debt. What we do not need, is a quest to put God in our debt.

[ 15 : 59 ] What we need, is a humility to recognize, that God has to show mercy upon us, or we have no hope. And the gospel is, that there is, a living God who does exist, who hears our prayers, that hope can be real, and that God does in Jesus, what no human being can do, in and of themselves.

And what is accomplished on the cross, is that, through the cross of Christ, God knowing me perfectly, and still, he offers me a salvation, which is immediate, when we put our faith and trust in Jesus, that's complete, which is full, whole, eternal, and irrevocable.

It means, that no amount of failure, whether it's a financial failure, a physical failure, emotional, relational, intellectual, whatever that, no amount of failure tomorrow, will make Jesus reconsider, his relationship with me, and his dying for me.

We'll catch him by surprise. And I can do, all sorts of good works, but all of those good works, are not something, that adds to what Jesus has done, because what Jesus does for us, on the cross, is perfect, complete, full, eternal, completely, and utterly sufficient, all done, by Jesus, for us.

And you see, this is really, really, really, really important. many of us, walk around, thinking to ourselves, no one will love me, as I really am.

[ 17 : 38 ] And, that's a heavy thing, to carry. It's a funny thing, but many, many people will carry it, even though they're dating, or even though they're married. Many people will carry that, even though they've been married, for many, many decades.

That, underneath it all, they have this basic sense, that no one, will love me, as I really am. And to them, the gospel says, that Jesus knew us perfectly, and still he offers me, a salvation, which is immediate, complete, full, whole, eternal, and irrevocable.

Many people, worry that, if people got closer to us, they'd like us less. And so, we can become, either reclusive types, or we can become, very good at jokes, and other types of things, to keep people at a distance, because, internally, we worry, that if people got to know, if they got closer to me, they'd like me less.

Jesus, the Bible says, that Jesus, knows me, better than I know myself. And still, he died on the cross, for me. And what he offers me, is something, which is, complete, full, whole, eternal, and irrevocable.

Many of us, worry that, we have things, in our past, that if people, were to find out about it, they'd leave. They'd leave us. But the Bible says, that Jesus knows, everything there is, to know about us, and still he died, on the cross for us.

[ 19 : 05 ] And what he offers us, is something, which is immediate, complete, full, whole, eternal, and irrevocable. Some of us worry, that no one, will ever care for us, or help us, or meet our deepest needs.

The Bible says, that Jesus knows, our deepest need, which is, that we have been, separated from the living God, the creator, the source of all life, that we are, alienated, and separate, from the source, of all life, that we are, in fact, cut flowers, so to speak, and that we can't, leave ourselves, to

fix ourselves, and our deepest, alienation, from our creator, helps to cause, alienation, with all sorts, of relationships, outside of ourselves, and to the world, and even to ourselves, and the Bible says, that Jesus, knowing all of that, about us, still he died for us, and he deals, with our deepest need, which is to be reconciled, to the living God, the source, of all health, and life, our creator, and that what he offers us, is complete, and full, and whole, and eternal, and irrevocable, and many of us, walk around, believing that there is, something so fundamentally, broken or wrong, about us, that we're doomed, that whatever we touch, we will wreck, and the Bible passage here, even uses the language, of doom and destiny, and it says, that when we put our faith, and trust in Jesus, that what is written, on our foreheads, is not doomed, but destined, for union with Christ, and that what is offered, to us in Jesus, is whole, and full, and complete, and eternal, and irrevocable, and that is, what Jesus does, for us on the cross, could you put the text, up again, let's read it together, again, for God, has not destined us, for wrath, but to obtain salvation, through our Lord, Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake, or asleep, we might live with him, therefore, encourage one another, and build one another up, just as you are doing, if you go back, and read, first Thessalonians, five chapters, I think it's only 89 verses, it doesn't take you, very long to read, you'll see that Paul, uses a sleep, as sort of a metaphor, of death, and so it's saying here, whether we die, or whether we are awake, we, whether we're alive, or whether we die, when we're in Jesus, and have union with him, we are with him, it's irrevocable, a couple of years ago, I was in the Starbucks, not as surprised, that I was in the Starbucks, a couple of years ago, those of you who know me, and I overheard a conversation, of two young women, just sitting sort of beside me, and they were talking about, the upcoming marriage, one of them was getting married, and the other one was their friend, they were talking about it, and you know, I guess it was bridesmaid, or something said to the future bride, he seems like a really nice guy, but you know, are you really sure, about getting married to him, and the bride said, I always remember this, I get the words slightly mixed up, but she said, no I really love him, I think we'll spend our life together, but you know, if it doesn't work out, I just divorce him, and she said it just like that, like if it doesn't work out, I'll just divorce him, and then she went on to say, like no my mom and dad, have both been divorced, more than once, and you know, my aunts and uncles, and my grandparents, so here's the thing, if you could put up the next point Andrew, when Jesus takes me as his own, he has no exit strategy, when Jesus takes me as his own, he has no exit strategy, see one of the things, which makes it so hard for us in life, is that so many things, break trust, institutions break trust, families break trust, relationships break trust, and that seems to be, such a common feature, in our society today, that whether we're conscious of it or not, often we enter into relationships, with an exit strategy, already in our mind, and when we live, in a world, where trust is very, very fragile, when we live in a world, where things break down, we just sort of assume, that exit strategies, are always wise, and we also sort of assume, that that's how God, will relate to us, and what happens is, we end up going one of two ways, when we think about that, we either start to go towards, a religious form of Christianity, like a common human religious form, of Christianity, where we start to become obsessed, with being religious, and obsessed with being spiritual, in the sense that if we can, just do enough of these, Christian type things, that God will be in our debt, and he will not have an exit strategy, with us, or we say, to heck with it all, let's go have a beer, let's not bother, let's just forget about it all, and it's because we bring, an exit strategy understanding, into hearing, chapter five verses nine to 11, but here's one of the wonderful things, one of the reasons I've chosen, first Thessalonians five, nine to 11, nine to 28, for these series of exhortations, is the way, that Paul brackets, these exhortations, it's not up on the screen, you have to actually use your Bibles, if you have them with you, if you don't have your Bibles with you, I'll read it out loud, but if you look at the end, of the exhortations, it's verse 23, first Thessalonians five, verse 23, after Paul gives these list of exhortations, here's what he says, now may the God of peace himself, sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be kept blameless, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, he who calls you as faithful, he will surely do it, he will surely do it, you see, it's so easy for us as Christians, say okay, we have to,

[ 25 : 27 ] I'm going to have to talk about encouragement, okay, I'm going to go find out those motivational posters, and I'll just give you a few little motivational thoughts, and it's all about us, but Paul, go back up to the scripture text, Andrew, notice the therefore, it's something about the gospel, that the therefore encourage, and in fact, in a sense, the therefore is going to follow every one of the next seven weeks, that therefore is there, and so, Paul goes, the Bible goes from the cross, the

gospel, to the fact that it will start to lead naturally, into a certain type of choosing, and a certain type of discipline, and at the end of it, just in case you've forgotten about the cross, and how it is that on the cross, what the salvation that God offers us is whole, and full, and complete, and eternal, and irrevocable, at the end, he reminds you that it's not only us choosing, that it's not just that as the gospel grips us, that as the gospel grips us, rather than it starting to lead us to be just like couch potatoes, in terms of virtues and change, that as the gospel grips us, without us realizing this, we get nudged into certain types of behaviors, without us realizing it, as the gospel grips us, we get drawn to certain types of changes in behavior, that as, without realizing it, as the gospel grips us, it starts to shape us in a certain type of way that we live, and as the gospel grips us, it also grounds us, that certain types of behavior make sense.

It makes sense. And here we see that, that when Jesus takes me as his own, he has no exit strategy.

There's several people that I'm talking to in Starbucks lately, and it's very obvious that, they haven't specifically said it, but I can sort of catch a bit of a subtext behind their questions, and they're relating to me.

They have a very common worry, that coming close to Jesus, they have no sense, they really have this sense, that the only choices between them, are some form of common human religion, whether that's, or being completely and utterly irreligious, and their worry about it, is that if they become Christian, they're going to have to start wearing weird clothes, because that's what religious people do, don't they?

Like real religious people, I mean, actually, you know, like they sort of, they should be going long facial hair if they're men, because for some reason, having a beard always makes you more like Jesus. I mean, sorry, I'm not making any comment, I used to have a big, I used to have a big long beard, by the way, but I, you know, but here's the thing, having a beard right now, would just make you a hipster, not weird, but, the thing about it is, is that many of us have a worry, I can tell when I'm talking to these different people, that they have a worry, that if they, come to Jesus, that they're going to have to start, being weird, do a whole pile of odd, religious activities, and pretend that they like it, and, they're going to end up becoming intolerant, they're going to end up hating women, hating gays, loving violence, and that's a, like that's a very, very real worry, for a lot of people, and, and I,

[ 29 : 07 ] I try to have, I'm trying to have this conversation, with a couple of them, to try to get them to see, that somehow, some of these things, like, hating women, or hating gays, or loving violence, is a human problem, and that the real question, isn't whether Christianity causes it, the real question is, that if in fact, it's a human problem, and agnostics, also have problems, with intolerance, atheists have problems, with intolerance, and hatred, and bigotry, but if it's a human problem, how does your system, of thought, help you to deal with it, and it's a, it's been a hard, you can pray for me, it's a hard slog, for me to try to get them, to see, that somehow, their position, like, what grounds it, here's the thing, say, say, say this text again, with me, say verses 9 to 11, with me again, for God has not destined us, for wrath, but to obtain salvation, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake, or asleep, we might live with him, therefore, encourage one another, and build one another up, just as you are doing, here's the thing, this text, you can put up the point,

Andrew, day by day, I am learning to follow the one, who died for me, and for everyone else, who trusts in him, day by day, the gospel is calling me, to learn to follow the one, who died for me, and for everyone else, who trusts in him, it's very struck, it's very, very striking, that Paul, is a former, I mean, he was a, religious, with a capital R, capital E, capital L, I'm not going to spell the rest of it, because I'm not that good at spelling, and I might mess it up, and it would be very embarrassing, if I couldn't spell religious, in public, but you get, every letter is capitalized, and he met Jesus, and here he is, it's the same guy, who's now speaking, to pagans, about what it is, that Jesus has done for them, and how, what Jesus, how Jesus, is completely, and utterly different, from common human religion, and, you know,

I was thinking about this, this week, as I was biking around, and stuff like that, that, you know, there's a lot of valid complaints, about missionaries, throughout history, and, and some of the cultural prejudices, and other things, that they brought along with them, but here's the thing, that people don't often think about, like in movies, and novels, okay, you have a missionary, and in, in the 19th century, many missionaries, who went to Africa, did you know, that when they went to

Africa, they brought their caskets, with them, they brought their possessions, and a casket, because they knew, they were going there, to die, they weren't going there, for fame and fortune, but to die, and, and, and so they, they go, and they leave the comfort of, it's in this particular case, England, and they go, and they start to learn, the language of China, or the language of the Maasai, in, in Kenya, or the, the language of, of some other people group, and some of their prejudices, get revealed, in this whole process, of living amongst these people, and learning their languages, and telling them about, about Jesus, but what about, all the people, who stayed behind, just to make money, the books, and the movies, and the history courses, at the university, they just assume, that what, all the people, back in England, that they're all, unbelievable, universalists, that they're all, just loving, the African, and the Chinese, that they don't have, any prejudice, prejudice, they're not even, in a place, to have their prejudice, revealed, and they care, so little for those, far away, that they stay, in the comfort, of their home, but there's, a dynamism, and energy, in the gospel, that if God, has so, accepted me, in Jesus, in something, which is immediate, full, whole, complete, eternal, and irrevocable, and that Jesus, isn't just the savior, of the people, in the Middle East, or of Europe, or of North America, but of, potentially, every single, people group, that in fact, there's a dynamism, in the gospel, not just to stay, in your group, with like-minded people, but to walk, across the room, from your group, to meet the person, who identifies themselves, as gay, or the immigrant, or the person, who hasn't come, to this country, and yes, in the process, of doing that, encounter, there will be things, revealed about ourselves, that we did not know, but those, who never go, will never even know, that those things, are in them, that those common, human problems, are there, and the profound, resource, of the gospel, is that day, day by day,

I am learning, to follow the one, who died for me, who died for me, why, shouldn't I follow, one who loves me, enough to die for me, who has no exit, strategy for me, and I am learning, to follow the one, who died for me, and for everyone else, who trusts in him, everyone else, who trusts in him, now some of you, might say, George, I'm sort of glad, that you shared with us, that you're not very good, at encouragement, we've been trying, to tell you about this, for a while, now it's sort of out, this, by the way, I know that not being, as good as encouragement, is something, like I really should, please pray for me, that I'm better at encouragement, this has been a very challenging, sermon for me this week, I've been praying, at least once a day, every day, that God would make me, a better encourager, some of you might know, a couple of years ago, at part of the sermon, I shared that I was an introvert, and so after the sermon, after I shared, that I was an introvert, and I said, by the way,

I don't think introversion, like being extroverted, is not making you closer, to Jesus, just some people, are extroverted, some are introverted, I'm introverted, and I'm not making this up, a woman after the service, said, oh, oh, Pastor George, that was so brave, of you to share, that you're an introvert, can I pray for you, and I said, I always need more purse, said, sure, and then she wrapped, her big arm around me, clutched me to her chest, in a headlock, and started to pray, for me to be delivered, from introversion, never dawning, that an introvert, might not like, having an arm, thrown around them, clutched, to their breast, while they pray, in a loud voice, for me to be delivered, of something, which I think, is just neutral, there'll be introverts, and extroverts, in heaven, but I would like, to be better, at encouraging, and some of you, might say, George, you can probably, relate to me, you know, it's very hard, for some of us, because of our backgrounds, to actually encourage, other people, because, boy, you know, if you just knew, my parents, if you knew, what my husband was like, or what my wife was like, or my ex-husband, or my ex-wife, or if you knew, what my kids were like, you'd know, how hard it'd be for me, if you knew, what my boss was like, if you knew, what my job was like, you'd understand, that it's very hard, for me, it's easy for me, to discourage people, and it's hard for me, to encourage people, and the fact of the matter, is that Jesus knows, all this about us, he knows our context, he knows our context, when he calls us, to encouragement, but listen to this again, put up the scripture,

[ 37 : 20 ] Andrew, let's read it together again, for God, has not destined us, for wrath, but to obtain salvation, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake, or asleep, we might live with him, therefore encourage one another, and build one another up, just as you are doing, in our culture, we often seem to think, that there are these, historical forces, and biological forces, and personal forces, which determine, the way we are, and often we're just a victim, of these powerful forces, but at the heart, of the gospel, is this sense, that not only, do we have the power, to choose, within our context, but that as we come, to Jesus, what Jesus gives us, is freedom, greater freedom, to choose, some of us, will always have context, which are very, very difficult, context,

which truly, will always shape, the form, of our discipleship, but the Bible, rejects this idea, that we are purely victims, purely, and utterly, pushed around, by forces of biology, or economics, or ideology, or culture, or class, but that there's a power, to choose,

I express it this way, if you could put it up Andrew, I am not doomed, by my circumstances, but I am destined, by God, for union with Christ, this day, and every day, for all eternity, I am not doomed, by my circumstances, but I am destined, by God, for union with Christ, this day, and every day, for all eternity, you'll notice, that in all of my points, most of my points, I either use I, or me, and I don't use that, because I'm trying to hold myself up, as a model, but that if you write them down, as points, then you're writing it down, as I, that's why I put I, that if you write that down, as an insight for you, and as you read it over later, you're reading it, not as George, but as I, as me.

So, the Bible is saying, it's going to maybe be very, very hard, for some of us, to encourage, because of, our circumstances, and maybe for some, it will be easy, but that we can begin today, to choose to encourage, our brothers and sisters, in Christ, in Church of the Messiah, and our brothers and sisters, in Christ, in other Christian communities, in Ottawa, that we can begin today, to choose, to encourage, we can begin, to choose, to encourage, I'm just going to put up, I'm going to sort of, bring this to a close, a couple of things, to sort of maybe, help you and I, with encouragement, and the fundamental thing, to help you with encouragement, is to maybe pray, a prayer like this, which is how actually, how I would word it, the next point, Andrew, help Jesus, please help me this day, to receive every day, to both receive encouragement, and to encourage others, to their true good, and your true glory,

Jesus, please help me this day, and every day, to both receive encouragement, and to encourage others, to their true good, and your true glory, and I've been, sort of praying my way, through to that prayer, throughout the week, you can pray, that I would continue, to pray it, and that God would answer it, in my life, that I would be better, encouraging others, and pray it for yourself, whether you're good, at encouragement or not, it's a, it's a, things begin to change, with prayer, one of the things, you can do, to be a better encourager, is maybe to ask somebody, to pray for you, that you'd be better, at encouragement, hopefully they will not, discourage you, by saying no, but they'll, please pray, that I would be better, encouragement, no, I'm not going to do that, for you, good grief, hopefully you'll say yes, that's part of your own learning, to be more encouraging, that if they ask you to pray, that you'll actually, try to do it, and, another thing, is I'm going to ask,

I'm going to invite you, to do something, to help me, I'm going to do this, every week after the sermon, as part of the sermon, I would really appreciate it, if this week, you emailed, either me, and my personal email address, or the church office, email address, with your pointers, about how to encourage, and, or your don'ts, about encouragement, encouragement, and, I will, Amy and I, Amy doesn't know this yet, but I'll, I'll take some of them, and we'll sort of, just, you know, maybe smooth up the grammar, or whatever, or if there's several, that are all the same, maybe merge them into one, and next week, I'll have, we'll have an insert, with some practical pointers, about encouragement, that have come from you, not me, maybe I'll, I'll add a couple, of my own, but you know, it begins, it begins with asking, that Jesus would, work in us, so that we can, I can receive encouragement, from him, and from others, because some of us, aren't good at receiving, encouragement, or hearing encouragement, and others, and it will also learn, to actually be active, in encouraging others, to their good, and to God's glory, and so,

[ 42 : 48 ] I encourage you folks, to think about Jesus, to be gripped, by the gospel, if you are here today, and you haven't given, your life to Jesus, if you thought, that coming to Jesus, is just another form, of common human religion, that's going to make you, push you into all sorts, of weird things, or bigotry, it's far from that, completely, and utterly, far from that, that what Jesus offers you, is completely, and utterly different, from common human religion, he offers you grace, and he offers, he has done something, on the cross for you, which is full, complete, that you can receive, immediately, that is perfect, is whole, is eternal, and is irrevocable, and that when Jesus, takes you as his own, he has no exit strategy, and as you follow, the one who loved you, so much, that he died for you, he will push, and pull you naturally, into things, that will reveal things, about yourself, that aren't good, but at the same time, it will provide, resources for you, to realize, that Jesus died, for this other person, as well, and that your obligation, is to pray, that they too, will give up, the choice of, common human religion, and irreligion, but come, to the, come to the savior, who loves them so much, that he died for them, on the cross, if you have not, yet come to Jesus, there's no better time, than today, to call out to Jesus, and say,

Jesus please, all that stuff, that George has talked about, I, I, I reject, common human religion, I reject irreligion, I come to you, please Jesus, be in my life, as savior, no better time, than right today, to say such prayer, let's stand, let's pray, let's pray, let's pray, let's pray, let's pray, first and foremost, father, we ask, that your holy spirit, would move, in our lives, that we will be, gripped by the gospel, that we will be, disciples of Jesus, gripped by the gospel, living for your glory, father, help us to be, gripped by the gospel, that what Jesus, has done for us, is done for us, and we can add, nothing to it, that it is done for us, and is complete, and perfect, and eternal, and full, and whole, and irrevocable, father, grip us with the gospel, that there is no exit strategy, on Jesus's behalf, towards us, father, grip us by the gospel, that this is something, that Jesus has done for us, can do for us, will do for us, and will do for others, that we meet, when they put their faith, and trust in him, father, lead us to prayer, grip us with the gospel, help us to encourage, in this we ask, in the name of Jesus, your son, and our savior, amen.  
Amen.