

Acts 20:1-16

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[0 : 0 0] 29 in your pew Bibles. After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia.

When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece. There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.

Sopater, the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him, and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus, and Gaius of Derbe and Timothy, and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus.

These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas, but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days.

On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight. There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered, and a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer.

[1 : 1 1] And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him.

And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while until daybreak, and so departed. And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted. But going ahead to the ship, we set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul aboard there, for so he had arranged, intending himself to go by land.

And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and went to Mytilene. And sailing from there, we came the following day opposite Chios, the next day we touched at Samos, and the day after that we went to Miletus.

For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. Well, Christians need encouragement.

I don't know about you, but there are a multitude of things that can easily weigh us down, distract us, confuse us, intimidate us, divide us, steal our joy, undermine our hope, and weaken our faith in the Lord.

[2 : 2 2] Maybe it's the feeling that you are alone. Perhaps you're new here in New Haven. Maybe you're working in a busy, advancement-driven environment, and you go home at night to a quiet but empty apartment, and you wonder how long it will take or whether you will ever find true friends here.

Maybe you've been here for a long time, but some of your closest brothers and sisters in Christ have left town and scattered across the world, and you feel weary of the revolving door syndrome.

Or maybe you're growing older, and with every funeral you attend, your circle of family and friends becomes gradually smaller. Or maybe it's the pressures of the world that weigh you down.

Maybe you're wrestling with questions and doubts that you haven't had to face previously. Perhaps you're surrounded by people who are smarter and seem more accomplished than you and seem happy and content, with no need or expressed desire for God, who seem perhaps vaguely respectful toward you, but inwardly dismissive of Christian beliefs.

Or maybe you live in the midst of chaos. Maybe in your family or your neighborhood or your workplace, there's pervasive gossip, rivalry, addiction, deception, manipulation, backstabbing, and you're tempted to become entangled in some of these toxic patterns.

[3 : 49] Maybe you've become disillusioned with the church. Sometimes conflict in the church is the most discouraging, because as Christians we sort of expect to have trouble in the world, but we know that Christians are called to rise to a higher standard.

And when we don't, when our sinful natures express themselves, we can easily become deflated or embittered or distant from one another. Well, I could go on and on, but I think the point is clear.

Christians need encouragement. And that's what this morning's passage is about. It's about encouragement from God for us individually and for us as a church. It's about how we can participate in actively encouraging one another.

Verses 1 to 12 in particular are bookended by references to encouragement. Verses 1 and 2 talk about how Paul encouraged the disciples at Ephesus and then in the region of Macedonia.

Verse 12, after Paul raised Eutychus from the dead, it said the people were not a little comforted. That's actually the same word that's translated encouragement earlier on or encouraged earlier on.

[4 : 57] Now, this word encouragement has a broad range of meaning. Mostly, I think we tend to think of it in terms of comforting or assuring or consoling someone.

It can also mean exhorting or even warning someone against potential future dangers. But both of these together, the word encouragement, it's as if a coach is speaking to their team and urging on the runners to finish their race well.

And so, whether it's a warning or a word of comfort, it's a word that motivates us to press on toward the goal of following Jesus Christ.

So, this morning, I want to look at not just the reasons that we need encouragement, but three ways that God provides encouragement for those of us who follow Jesus. The first way that God provides encouragement is through community, through Christians spending time and sharing resources together.

And what we see in this passage is that the Apostle Paul went to great lengths to spend time in person with God's people. Verse 1, he was in Ephesus, and there had just been a riot.

[6 : 09] If you were here last week, Pastor Matt talked about that. It says, after the uproar ceased, it doesn't say Paul immediately ran out of town. It says he sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed.

He very intentionally stayed in a city where there had been this furious uproar. But before he left, he wanted to speak to the disciples and encourage them to persevere.

Then verse 2, he went through Macedonia and gave them much encouragement. Most scholars believe that this verse 2 actually refers to a period of one or two years.

Paul refers to some of his travels in this period in 2 Corinthians chapter 2 and chapter 7. And then it says he spent three more months in Greece, and then he returned through Macedonia again.

He spent a lot of time traveling around, and his main purpose was to encourage the Christian believers in these different places. For much of Acts chapter 16 through 19, we've seen Paul traveling around and preaching the gospel and planting churches in cities where none had previously existed.

[7 : 21] But in this chapter, he changes his focus. He goes back around to those same cities where he had planted new churches, and he spends time with these believers, encouraging them and building them up.

You know, Paul wasn't just concerned about preaching the gospel to as many people as possible, as quickly as possible, as extensively as possible. He was also concerned that these people who had come to believe the good news of Jesus would grow and go on to maturity.

And so we invested this time, this probably a two-year period in this chapter, encouraging these Christian believers. Now, we see not only the Apostle Paul, but also ordinary Christians spending extended time together.

In verse 7 through 12, between... Verse 1 through 6 sort of focuses on Paul's travels, and then 13 through 16 again focuses on Paul's travels. But in the middle sandwiched between those two sections, we get a little insight, a glimpse into one particular Christian community, the one at Troas.

And verse 7 says, they met on the first day of the week, that is, on Sunday. Now, in the pagan Roman Empire, most people had to work on Sunday. Sunday was not normally a day off.

[8 : 40] And so Christians would either meet very early in the morning, sometimes before sunrise, or in this case here, in the evening, after work.

And Luke tells us they gathered together to break bread. And that phrase was a common expression for sharing a meal together. The Christians didn't just meet in a building, hear somebody talk, and then go their own separate ways.

It seems that every week they sat down and shared a meal together. As an expression of mutual trust and love, they were treating each other like family, like close friends.

And this was the common practice of the early Christians in several places. Acts 2 talks about the Christians in Jerusalem who broke bread in their own homes. 1 Corinthians 11 refers to a common meal that Christians in Corinth routinely share together.

And it was in this context of regularly sharing meals together and sitting around a table and spending extended and both formal and informal time together that Christians also celebrated what we now call the Lord's Supper.

[9 : 50] 1 Corinthians 11 also talks about this. Share eating bread and drinking from a cup to remember Jesus' death and resurrection and to celebrate His ongoing presence with them by His Holy Spirit.

So the Lord's Supper wasn't just a time where individuals connected with God. It was celebrated in the context of a community of people who were committed to each other and sharing their lives with each other.

So just imagine, right, at the end of a tiring day of work in Troas, which was a port city where people were constantly coming and going, Christians found refuge and joy in gathering together.

And they were reminded as they gathered together, they were reminded of their true identity, that it wasn't just whatever work they had done throughout the day, but they were God's beloved people, welcomed into His household, empowered by His Spirit, and provided for by their loving Heavenly Father.

And so they were encouraged. Christians spent time together, and they also shared their resources with one another. Verse 4, interestingly, tells us that Paul was accompanied by seven other guys from five different cities.

[11 : 03] And in verse 5, Luke seems to include himself in the mix because the pronouns turn from they to we. So it seems that Luke also joined them, and Luke may have been from Philippi, which would have been a six-different city.

Now you wonder, well, why does Paul have this group of people that seem to be randomly mentioned as traveling with him? Luke doesn't tell us here why they were together, but we learn later in Acts, Acts 24, 17, and also more extensively from 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 and Romans 15, we learn that at this time, Paul was in the process of collecting a large amount of money from the churches throughout Macedonia and Greece.

And the reason he was collecting a large amount of money is because the Christians in Jerusalem, the Jewish Christians, were going through a time of extreme financial hardship. And so Paul wanted to collect a generous gift to support these brothers and sisters.

And it was a sign of solidarity between the Gentile churches scattered throughout the Roman world and the Jewish Christians back in Jerusalem where it all began. And it was a generous gift that showed the unity of the church across geographical boundaries and across ethnic and national boundaries.

And so most likely, this team of guys in verse 4 were a team of representatives from different churches who were going together to deliver this gift to Jerusalem.

[12 : 37] Because as we'll see, this is where Paul's going. Luke gives us a lot of the stops along the way, but he's heading to Jerusalem, and he gets there in the next chapter, in chapter 21. So these Christians were spending time together, and they were sharing their resources with one another.

Now, what can we take away from these examples? You know, this passage doesn't give us rules for how or when or where we should gather for weekly Christian worship services.

But it does give us a glimpse into what I think is an attractive community. So let me say two things. I want to say, first, it's worth it to gather together in person with other believers.

Now, I know it's not always easy. Maybe, you know, it wasn't easy for you to get here this morning. Paul had to travel long distances to meet with believers in different cities.

The Christians in Troas had to work all day and then meet in the evening. That's probably why Eutychus fell asleep, by the way. Eutychus was a common name for a slave. And he had probably spent all day, I don't know, loading ships in the port or working in the field under the sweating in the hot sun.

[13 : 58] And then he was listening to Paul talk for hours in a hot and stuffy room. No wonder he fell asleep. We'll get back to him later. The point is, it's worth it to spend time together.

Even if you're tired. Even if you have to travel some distance. Even if coming to church delays your kid's regular nap schedule one day a week. Even if there is disorder and rioting in the city like there was in Ephesus.

It's worth it. Because when we come together, God encourages us. We're reminded that we're not alone. God has called us to himself and God has called us into his family.

And so I want to encourage you. Take advantage of the opportunities to not only come on Sunday and listen to the message and participate as we sing and pray together but also to connect informally with one another.

As the Christians did by sharing a meal every week in Troas. Stay for fellowship hour or come to the picnic in the park today or join a small group that meet either here in the building or in people's homes during the week.

[15 : 08] Christian community takes time to develop. It can't be rushed. And so that's why it's worth it to spend time together. And yet it's as we spend time together and as we encourage one another that God builds us up and strengthens us for the challenges that we're facing.

So it's worth it to gather in person with other believers. It's worth it to share our resources with other Christians more broadly. And we have some great opportunities to do that as well. That's why we're supporting the New London Church Plant and wanting to send this group of believers off as they prepare to launch a church in the next few months by praying for them, by investing in them personally, and by giving generously to them.

That's why we have ongoing partnership with missionaries and campus workers like Laura and missionaries like Hannah Massad who's coming next week. And there's all kinds of other opportunities that we'll be sharing in the coming weeks about how we can share resources together with other churches in New Haven, with other churches throughout the world, and how we can learn to give to one another and receive from one another.

And that's one way that God builds us up and encourages us. So God encourages us through community. That's the first thing. Second, God encourages us through His Word.

Verse 2 says, Paul went through the regions and gave them much encouragement. Literally, it could be translated, some other translations say something like this, having encouraged them with many words.

[16 : 49] Specifically mentions words. And words are some of the most powerful means, well, both of cutting people down as well as building people up.

And in this passage, we see three forms of encouragement through word. First, we see preaching or teaching, public teaching. Verse 7 says, Paul prolonged his speech until midnight.

He didn't, it seemed like he didn't do this routinely, the all-night preaching marathon, but he intended to depart the next morning. He had one night, so he took advantage of it. And he wanted the people to get the most out of it.

In the second half of this chapter, we have another example of one of Paul's speeches, which we'll look at in a couple, in two weeks, where he's encouraging and exhorting the elders of the church in Ephesus.

Paul was committed to faithfully preaching and teaching the Word of God because he believed that God would change people's lives through it. Isaiah 55 says, For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there, but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, bringing seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth.

[18 : 08] It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and it shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. And you know, at Trinity, we really believe this.

That's why the sermon is a central part of our worship service. It's not the only important thing that we do on Sunday, but it's central because we believe that God works through the preaching of His Word.

So come and prayerfully expect God to be at work when we hear from His Word. Praise God that He uses something so ordinary as spoken words to enliven our faith and strengthen our hope and motivate our love.

You know, if you're looking for a new church, let me urge you, find a church where the pastor and the leaders believe that God changes people's lives through His Word faithfully proclaimed and applied in the power of the Holy Spirit.

But, you know, it's not only preaching that God uses to change people. It's also conversation and dialogue.

[19 : 21] The words used to describe Paul's teaching, he talked with them, verse 7, he conversed with them, verse 11, they don't only refer to sermons or speeches.

In many contexts, they can refer to dialogue and discussion. And so, Paul certainly spent time preaching and proclaiming the Word, but he also spent time interacting with people about it.

Deuteronomy 6, Moses instructed the people of Israel, he said, these words that I command you today, let them be on your heart. And he says, you shall teach them to your children diligently, and you shall talk of them.

when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. In other words, what Moses was saying was, don't only, don't limit the truth about God to formal gatherings where the law was read in the Old Testament, for example.

He was saying, let the reality of who God is, God's character, God's promises, God's commands, God's mighty acts, let that shape your informal, ongoing conversation.

[20 : 42] He applies it particularly to parents. I think for those of us who are parents, let us look for opportunities to communicate and dialogue with our children about spiritual matters, not just expect the Sunday school teachers to do that, and not even just limit that to a formal time for family devotions.

But look for opportunities throughout the day as questions come up, as situations come up, to share truths about God and to point your children to God and engage with them throughout the day.

But it also applies more broadly, not just to parents. So when you get together with another believer, or when you talk with somebody perhaps after church this morning, don't just immediately go to, how's the weather?

I mean, that's, come on, it's sort of boring. Right? That's the conversation you have when you can't find anything better to talk about. I mean, it's better than nothing sometimes, right? Sometimes it's a way of loving people by engaging with them at whatever level you can find.

But we're Christians, and if we're Christians, we can go further than that. Ask questions like, what did you take away from the sermon today? Or, what has God been doing in your life lately?

[22 : 04] Or, are there any ways I can be praying for you? Questions like that can open the door to encouraging one another by sharing what God is teaching you and doing in your life, and by, and also how we can pray and support each other.

And it's one way that God encourages us, not only through formal preaching and teaching, but also through informal conversations. The third form of encouragement through word is that God encourages us through writing, through His word written.

It doesn't say, it doesn't tell us this in this passage, but Paul wrote some of his most extensive letters during this period of time. He wrote 2 Corinthians during the time of verse 2 when he was in Macedonia.

He wrote Romans during the time that he was in Greece in Corinth, actually, in verse, well, it mentions that in verse 3, verse 2 and 3. So some of Paul's most lengthy letters, written letters, he wrote during this time.

And he took the time to write these letters to encourage Christians that he couldn't be with in person. And so, you know, it's, if there's, if there is a Christian believer that you can't be with in person, who needs encouragement, take the time, it's, it can be worth it, take the time to write to them as Paul did.

[23 : 35] And you know, part of the, one of the main purposes of both Romans and 2 Corinthians and most of Paul's letters was literally this, to encourage the believers. 2 Corinthians begins by talking about the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who comforts us in all our afflictions so that we may be able to comfort others who are in any affliction with the comfort that we ourselves have received from God.

and toward the end of Romans. He says, whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

And then he says, may the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another in accord with Christ Jesus. You know, there's a lot of stuff in 2 Corinthians and Romans and all of Paul's letters, but one of the main purposes, one of his overall purposes, was to encourage these believers in Corinth and in Rome to warn them against potential dangers, to comfort them and reassure them of God's promises and God's love for them, and to motivate them to persevere in faith and in hope and in love.

So through his word, preached, discussed, written, that God gives us wisdom to face life's many challenges, understanding of his character and his ways, warning against spiritual dangers and reassurance of his promises.

God encourages us through his word. That's the second point. So God encourages us through community, he encourages us through his word, and third, he encourages us through his mighty deeds.

[25 : 18] This passage begins, the central part of this passage, as I said earlier, is the story about Eutychus. And so I want to camp out there for the rest of the time. Right?

Eutychus falls from a third-story window, and he's apparently raised from the dead. Now you might wonder, of all the stories that Luke could have chosen to include in the book of Acts, why did he include this one?

What's his point? Besides the fact that Luke was there, and Luke seems to enjoy telling good stories. But what are we supposed to take away from this story?

Well, let me start with two, what I think are minor points that are not the central point of the passage, but I think are still worth a brief mention, and then I'll get to the main point. Number one, if you've ever fallen asleep in church, you're not alone.

The way Luke tells the story, he actually seems quite sympathetic to Eutychus. Verse 7, he says, Paul prolonged his speech until midnight.

[26 : 24] Now that means if they started at 8, Paul had been going already for 4 hours. Verse 8, he explains, there were many lamps or torches in the upper room, which meant it would have become hot and stuffy by that time.

Eutychus was sitting at the window, trying to get some air, gradually dozing off, and Paul goes on and on. Verse 9, Paul talked still longer, and finally, Eutychus was overcome by sleep.

I mean, you can't blame the kid, right? In this case, if you have trouble staying awake in church or paying attention during the sermon, let me say two things.

Number one, do what you can to stay awake. This is God's Word we're here to listen to after all. So, you know, if you can, get a good night's sleep on Saturday night. Don't stay up until 4 a.m.

Wake up, eat a little breakfast, drink a little coffee if that helps you, stand at the back if that helps you not fall asleep on these hot summer Sundays. But second, don't stay away out of the fear of falling asleep.

[27 : 33] Even if you're coming off an overnight shift or you're taking meds that make you drowsy, know that there is a place for you in the church. I'd rather you come and hear half the sermon than stay home because you're afraid to fall asleep.

You can also sit next to someone and say, I need you to help me. And God gave you an elbow, so just, you know, help me stay awake.

It's part of how we can help each other. I'm serious, actually. Sometimes that's a way to love your neighbor is to gently help them to stay awake. All right.

Second minor point. God doesn't just care about adults, He cares about young people. Verse 12 says, Eutychus was a youth. That word was commonly used for a boy between about nine and 14 years old.

Now, if you're a middle schooler, maybe you can identify with Eutychus. Maybe you feel like it's sometimes hard to track with a long sermon. Maybe you feel like the adults in the church don't really notice you or understand you.

[28 : 42] Maybe you wonder whether you really belong here in the church, but let me say to you, God sees you and God knows you and He cares about you right where you are. And there is no minimum age requirement for the Holy Spirit to be powerfully at work in and through your life.

Samuel the prophet heard the voice of God as a boy. Josiah became king of Israel when he was eight. And Eutychus, the otherwise unknown middle school age boy, was rescued after a terrible accident.

And in verse 10, it says, when Paul went down to Eutychus, it says he took him in his arms. Or literally, he threw his arms around him. The same word is used in the story of the prodigal son.

when the father ran to him and threw his arms around him when he had come home. And the father said he was lost and now he's found. He was dead and now he's alive.

Imagine if you were Eutychus, falling asleep on the windowsill and waking up with the apostle Paul throwing his arms around you and bringing you to life.

[29 : 52] I mean, that'd be pretty amazing. All right, those are the side points. The main point is this. The raising of Eutychus is meant to greatly encourage us.

Verse 12, Luke gives an ironic understatement. He says, the people took the youth away alive and were not a little comforted. They were, I think, very greatly comforted.

And the raising of Eutychus was a physical reminder that God brings life out of death. Every time that those Christians in Troas gathered and saw that boy Eutychus, they'd be reminded, our God brings life out of death, just like he did for this boy.

Now, of course, most of the time we don't see miracles like this. In the Bible, the only people who saw dead people restored to life were Elijah and Elisha in the Old Testament and Jesus, Paul, and Peter in the New Testament.

So, even in the Bible, it's not a common occurrence. It's not something that we should expect. And even in this very chapter, the Apostle Paul is on his way to Jerusalem and he's talking about being persecuted and being put in prison and even being willing to die.

[31 : 16] Eutychus was raised from the dead and sometimes God does. Sometimes God still does. Powerful miracles. Amazing, divine intervention. But we still live in a world of persecution and sickness and war and all kinds of losses and crosses.

But every once in a while, God breaks into our world. He breaks into our world that's under the power of sin and death and He gives us a little picture of what is to come when one day Jesus Christ will come again and make all things new.

And on that day, there will be healing and peace and joy and wholeness and life and Jesus will reign forever and ever.

And every time, they would look at Eutychus. when they gathered on a Sunday, on that first day of the week, they remembered not only did God raise our Eutychus and restore Him to life so that He could be with us for the rest of His earthly life, God raised our Savior, Jesus Christ, from the dead.

Never to die again. You see, every miraculous healing, every providential deliverance, every answered prayer is an extension of the greatest resurrection of all, the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[32 : 43] And it's a foretaste of what God will do one day to take us up in His arms and give us life forever in His kingdom. Brothers and sisters, the resurrection of Jesus is the most encouraging reality of all.

If you're feeling alone, remember Jesus' final words to His disciples. Behold, I am with you always, even to the very end of this present evil age.

If you feel surrounded by the pressures of the world, remember that you serve a risen Savior who said, in this world you will have trouble, but take heart, for I have overcome the world.

If you're weary because of your labors in the church, listen to the words of Paul. Therefore, he said, my beloved brothers and sisters, and this was at the end of his great chapter on the bodily resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15, he says, in light of the resurrection of Christ, let nothing move you.

Always be abounding in the work of the Lord because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. Brothers and sisters, be encouraged.

[34 : 00] Be encouraged in community, be encouraged through God's Word, be encouraged as we see God's mighty deeds. Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you that you care about us all the way from the beginning of our lives to the end.

And Lord, from the first moment when you open our eyes to see you and believe in you and begin following you all the way to the end of our lives and to the day when you will return in glory.

We thank you for how you have given us one another, for how you've given us your word, and how you have acted in history, in this world, to encourage us.

Lord, we pray that we would be encouraged today and that by your Spirit that we would encourage one another so that we might press on toward the goal that you have set before us.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Please stand and sing with us.

[35 : 24] Thank you.