

Encourage and build! - Motto text 2025

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[0 : 00] We're going to read 1 Thessalonians 4, verse 13 through to 5 and verse 11 in order to give the context for our motto text, which is, as you will see when you get your bookmark, therefore encourage one another and build each other up.

It doesn't have on the last bit, just as in fact you are doing. So hopefully that is a reflection of what we're doing anyway, but I'm going to exhort and encourage you to do it all the more in 2025.

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep. Now, he's not talking about when you go to bed at night, all right. He's talking about dying. But I like the fact that he calls it falling asleep.

See, dead sounds so final, doesn't it? But falling asleep sounds so very temporary. I expect to wake up. And Christians are told by our Lord Jesus Christ that because he is the resurrection and the life, we who believe in him will never die.

We will fall asleep unless the Lord comes before we will fall asleep. But we will arise again.

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep or to grieve like the rest of men who have no hope.

[1 : 23] He doesn't say don't grieve. He says you will grieve because you're human and you miss people, you love people, but you have hope for yourself and for them.

We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who fall asleep in him. That's encouraging, isn't it? You could preach on every verse.

According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who fall asleep.

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Some kind of flying.

[2 : 21] That'll be good. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore, encourage each other with these words. Now, brothers, about times and dates, we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night, while people are saying peace and safety, destruction will come on them suddenly as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

But you, brothers, are not in darkness, so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness, so then, let us not be like others who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled.

For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.

For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath, but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

He died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him.

Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. Amen.

And the Lord will bless to us the reading of His Word.

[3 : 50] It's another covenant service, so another opportunity to rededicate and recommit. But hopefully we didn't do that routinely, we didn't do that half-heartedly or with heavy hearts, because ideally what we're doing in expressing our recommitment to the Lord is just re-saying what we ideally say every day, that, Lord, today I'm taking up my cross and I'm following You.

Today I'm giving myself to You. Today I'm serving You. This is not something we do once a year. But New Year is a good opportunity to recommit and to rededicate.

And we do that because we have experienced the joy and the blessing, but also the encouragement of walking with the Lord and experiencing His goodness every day. Now, of course, it's always about perspective. So this morning we woke up to news from our brethren in the countryside that they're covered in snow.

And my wife was very jealous to see the snowman being built and looking out of the window at the miserable rain as it came down in Whitby. And you could easily get discouraged by that, except, well, you got to church where they didn't.

[5 : 19] Encouragement and discouragement are perspectives. We can so easily be discouraged when we get the wrong perspective. See, I could be discouraged that Newcastle didn't have a good start to the season.

But as you know, they're doing very well at the moment, and I'm more encouraged than I was this time last year when they had all their injuries and with the prospect perhaps of reaching a final soon.

You'll hear more about that, I'm sure, if it happens, and nothing about it if it doesn't happen. We can look in the mirror and see ourselves getting older and think, oh, I'm getting older.

How terrible. Not as handsome as I used to be. Or we can look in the mirror and say, well, I am one day nearer heaven and to the perfection of a resurrected body where all of these aches and pains will disappear.

And I'll not have to visit the doctor and be told that I need to lose weight or wear glasses or get a hearing aid, and they're just the things that he might tell me. All my life you have been faithful.

[6 : 29] All my life you have been so, so good. With every breath that I am able, I will sing of the goodness of God.

It's easy to sing, isn't it? But it's true. It's true. And there's an encouragement in knowing that the Lord is with us that the Lord is for us and that nothing can be against us.

But there's a challenge, isn't there, when we recommit to the Lord. I've got a quote here from Howard Hendricks. Howard Hendricks once said, people who have been Christians for a long time, it'll come up, I think, Christians who have been, sorry, people who have been Christians for a long time and are more than 50 years old should be the most excited, committed, pure, servant-like people in a church.

The very energy of a church ought to come from them. They should be on the forefront of evangelism in prayer. Why? Because they've lived with God the longest.

They've applied the Word to their lives for so long that they've become more obedient and mature than those who've been Christians for only a few years.

[7 : 43] And part of me feels challenged by that and part of me thinks that's how it should be. If you're new to the faith or you're young in the faith, then get alongside an older Christian who's walked this walk for a long time and be encouraged by the way that they have overcome their trials and struggles and dealt with their pain and suffering and dealt with the setbacks and the hardships and dealt with the pain and the grief.

And here they tell you how they have overcome by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. They have words and experience to encourage you and by encouraging you to build you up.

So our motto text this year says, Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up. Now the church of Thessalonica was a very encouraging church to the Apostle Paul.

If you have your Bible, you turn back to 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 and verses 5 to 10. Paul tells us about this church. He says, When our gospel came to you, it did not simply come with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.

You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord in spite of severe suffering. You welcomed the message with joy given by the Holy Spirit, and so you became a model to all believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

[9 : 18] The Lord's message rang out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia. Your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore, we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you give us.

They tell us how you turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrong.

You get the impression that Paul was encouraged by them, don't you? What a difference the gospel had made in their lives. What change had come over them. And the fact that they were walking faithfully with Jesus, in spite of the fact that they were suffering, was a source of real encouragement.

You see, it's important for us to get that understanding of the Christian life. We must never fall into the trap of thinking that once you become a follower of Jesus, life becomes rosy, and nothing goes wrong, and you'll have a full bank account, and you'll never have to visit the doctor again, and you'll never have any hardships or difficulties.

You'll never have to sit in traffic queues or wait for parking spaces, and your football team will never lose again. It doesn't happen. It's not the real world.

[10:34] It's not the world our Father in heaven exposes us to. Suffering and hardship, though we don't like it, is actually good for us. Every young man or woman who goes to the gym knows that.

They certainly don't go to feel that they'll never have any aches or pains. They understand that in order to build up muscle, in order to build up resilience and endurance, in order to increase their energy, they have to put themselves through suffering.

Did you balk at the statement, put me to suffering? Naturally, you would balk at it. It's not something we want, but it is something that is good for us.

It proves our mettle. It proves our worth. It shows whether we're true or not. Our faith is tested, Peter says, through fire.

Now, lots of people think, well, I thought, you know, when I turned to Christ, I thought all my problems are going to disappear. They're not disappearing. They're not going anywhere.

[11:47] But neither is your Father letting you down. Suffering is His way of testing. And when we go through times of trial and suffering, and it's difficult, as it will be, we need one another.

We need each other to help, and to encourage, and to strengthen us, and to build us up, because it's hard. It's not easy. If we lose somebody we love, we need the comfort that others will bring to us. If we're going through difficulties, perhaps of a financial or material nature, we need one another's support, and to provide for us. In all of these various ways, by being together, by being in community, and by taking seriously the Lord's, or the Apostles' exhortation here, to build one another up, and to encourage one another, we help each other get through.

We are not meant to live this life alone. It's too difficult. We need one another, and the support we give to one another, in order to grow.

So, this verse says two things. First of all, it says, we are to encourage one another.

Encouragement is an important gift in the Christian life.

[13:06] Romans 12, verses 7 to 8, makes this clear. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.

If it is serving, let him serve. If it is teaching, let him teach. If it is encouraging, let him encourage. It is a gift.

When somebody walks into church, or walks into your life, and they're like a ray of sunshine, and they just have the right words to say at the right time, and when you're struggling, and when you're down, they come alongside you and say, let's pray about this, and they leave you feeling better than you were before, you have been blessed with the gift of encouragement.

You have received the gift of encouragement. And I thank God, don't you, that there are so many among us who are just gifted in that way. It's a wonderful blessing to be encouraged.

Now, I know you can have people who are of the other ilk, you know, who are EOs. There are always EOs. There are EOs in any community, and some people are disposed that way.

[14:16] You know, things are going to go wrong. Things are terrible. They are going to get worse. Yeah? Perhaps they need to pray for the gift of encouragement.

Not everybody has that gift. Some are more disposed to melancholy, perhaps. But, we're encouraged to seek this gift of encouragement by the Apostle Paul.

Earnestly to desire spiritual gifts. And encouragement is likewise something that arises from our being united with Christ in faith and love. So, Paul says in Philippians 2, verses 1 to 4, If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look out not only for your own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Did you notice what he said? If you have any encouragement from being united to Christ, when it comes to working together in community, when it comes to supporting and helping people in community, it's very easy for us to become quite judgmental about it.

[15:48] Say, well, I helped that person once and they weren't very grateful, so I'm not going to bother again. Or I've helped that person and they're still in a mess, so they've obviously not learned the lesson, so I'm not going to bother again.

And yet Paul says that's not to be the yardstick of judgment. The way we treat one another is the way Jesus treats us. And how does Jesus treat us according to Philippians chapter 2?

Well, he laid down his life for us. He humbled himself. Became obedient to death, even death of the cross.

Not because we deserved it, we were undeserving, but because of his love for us. And love is sacrificial. And love is giving.

And love is caring. And love is kind, as we're going to see. If we have comfort from his love, if we have fellowship with the Spirit, if we have tenderness and compassion, like Jesus, we will serve one another and encourage one another and help each other and carry each other's loads and bear with one another in love and do all of those things because we are united to Jesus.

[17:06] The church is unlike any other institution. We're not in the business of kicking people out if they mess up. We're in the business of putting our arms around them and loving them and encouraging them and helping them to come to a place of repentance so that they may walk with Jesus again.

We're not in a place where we're judging them or looking down upon them. We look at them with the eyes and with the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That's how we encourage each other. And you know, that's really important when, for example, we have to confess our sins to one another. It's very hard to confess sin and we feel ashamed and we feel that we've got a kind of hide.

But we're never asked to hide in the church. If we have encouragement in Christ by being united to Christ, we openly confess sin and seek each other's prayer and support and help.

We pull together. We're together in encouragement and in love with the love of Jesus. And we do that with humility just like Jesus.

[18:15] Humility. There but for the grace of God go I when I'm tempted to kind of be harsh with people. Oh, you messed up again. You really annoy me.

I'm so frustrated with you. Ah, John, remember who you are. Imagine if the Lord treated you in that way, John. I'm so frustrated with you.

You've let me down again. I feel embarrassed to call you my child. Imagine if God said that. Where would I be? There but for the grace of God go I.

Humility. And when people mess up, those who love them, those who want to encourage them, approach them with humility. They understand human weakness and sinfulness.

They understand how low people can fall. And they have compassion and tenderness for them. And if you have an environment of community like that, what a community to belong to.

[19:14] Everybody would want to belong to such a community. A loving, gracious community in which people show love. And think about a great New Testament example of this.

Barnabas. Barnabas. You know, that wasn't his name. You know what his name was? It was Joseph. He was called Joseph. He was a Levite from Cyprus.

He was Jewish by race, but he lived in the diaspora. But he was called Barnabas as a nickname. Do you know why he was given that nickname by the apostles?

Because he was a son of encouragement. And he was a son of encouragement because one day he sold a field and he brought all the money that he got from it and give it to the apostles and they distributed it to the people in need.

And when anybody thought of Barnabas, they thought, oh, Barnabas, he brings a smile to you. He brings joy to your heart. What an encourager he is. And do you know why this is really important to mention Barnabas at this point?

[20 : 15] Because the man who wrote this epistle might never have even been in the church had Barnabas not gone to find him when he was Saul. When Saul was converted and Ananias was told by the Lord to baptize him, all the other apostles were scared of Saul.

They thought he was a spy. They thought he had ulterior motives. And what do we find the scripture says? That Barnabas went and found him and brought him to the apostles and then he wrote a letter where he said, encourage one another and build each other up.

I love it. It's great. What might have happened had Barnabas not encouraged him? And then think back over the years, people you've known, people you've witnessed to.

Remember that time you woke up one morning and you felt, well, I just, I feel that of the Lord to ring this person up or to drop them a line or just to pop in and visit. And then you give them a word of encouragement and you find it's just what they needed.

Where would they have been without it? What might have happened without it? I remember hearing, reading the story of Smith Wigglesworth. He was quite an eccentric character, wasn't he?

[21 : 31] But that time he went along a street and he felt prompted by the Holy Spirit to open a letterbox and shout through the letterbox, Jesus loves you. He opened the letterbox and shouted through the letterbox, Jesus loves you.

And a man who was about to hang himself took the rope off his neck. You never know by being available to the Lord and by being willing to be a son of encouragement, you never know the difference that you may make for somebody's life.

Tremendous. Because to encourage, the Greek word is very interesting. It means to call, you're called to be alongside somebody.

Para kaleo. Kaleo means call. Para means, you know, parallel lines to be alongside. You're called to be alongside somebody.

You're called to get alongside and help them along. Support them, encourage them, bring them a nice word, lift them up when they're struggling. Support and provide for them practically if they're in need.

[22 : 40] That's what it means to encourage. And so Paul says, let's encourage one another. And if you think about encouraging one another, how often should you do it?

Hebrews 3, verse 13. Let us see the next slide. Hebrews 3, verse 13. Sorry, carry on. Encourage one another day after day.

Well, there's a challenge. I don't feel like it today. Ah, but notice this is not a suggestion. This is a commandment.

Encourage one another day after day. Well, I need encouragement today. I really need encouragement today. The strange thing about encouragement, when you need encouragement, is that by encouraging others, you encourage yourself.

Because it's impossible to encourage somebody without having a positive attitude. Yeah? Well, I suppose I'd better be nice to you. Imagine somebody got up in the morning, I suppose I'd better be nice to you today.

[23 : 45] You wouldn't feel like they were being nice to you, would you? But if somebody says, can I make you a cup of tea? Champion. That's an encouragement.

Can I go shopping for you? Can I come and visit? We'll have a time of prayer together. By encouraging somebody, you encourage your own heart.

It's good for you. Thankfulness, it's good for you. Day after day. You know, our sinful nature will say, well, I feel miserable, so I'm going to make everybody else feel miserable as well.

Yeah? Well, that's not good, is it? It's not encouraging. By having a heart that says, today I will encourage somebody, it means that I will encourage my own heart as well.

So do it. And encourage one another daily by loving your brothers and sisters. There are 59, at least 59 one another's in the New Testament. An awful lot of them are about loving.

[24 : 48] Loving one another, being devoted to one another in brotherly love, et cetera, et cetera. Being patient and bearing with each other in love. Even my favorite verse of all, which I do every time you meet me, greet one another with a holy kiss.

Yeah. There's an irony there, of course. Not so fond of kissing or hugging. But if you want to hug me or kiss me, it's fine. I've said it today. Today's the day probably will happen.

But it's an expression of love. Whatever's an expression of love. I'm not advocating, you know, lots of kissing. I'm just kind of saying that was the usual way of doing it.

Then handshakes work just as well to the good old Brits. Loving your brothers and sisters doesn't mean I will feel affection toward them all of the time. It does mean I will practically do them good. I will not do them harm. Love is an action. It's an act of your will. It's a determination to do good to somebody who is in need.

[25 : 54] And then we encourage one another by being gracious and forgiving. We've already talked about that. Live in harmony with one another. Stop passing judgment on one another. Accept one another just as Christ accepted you.

Be at peace with each other. Be kind and compassionate to one another. Let's not be conceited, provoking one another to wrath. Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Instruct one another.

Do not slander one another. Don't grumble against each other. Here's a good one. I love grumbling. Isn't grumbling a great word? It sounds like crumble. Crumble is a great pudding.

Grumble is a great word. Or grumble, grumble, grumble. It's impossible to grumble with a smile on your face. Isn't it? You just can't do it.

So when you're tempted to grumble, make yourself smile and you'll stop grumbling. I'll have to watch out for grumbling today because if I grumble today, my kids will remind me of what I said in the sermon.

[26 : 56] And then we encourage one another by being a supportive and available presence for people just every day. Wash one another's feet.

Aren't you glad that was a customary thing if you don't like feet? I've done it. I've washed people's feet and when I've washed people's feet, I've only done it once or twice. It is actually a really humbling thing to do.

Yeah? You really need lots of soap suds so you can't see the condition of the feet you're washing. But actually, it really is a humbling thing to do.

Now, we don't have dusty roads, thank the Lord, and so we're not called to do it. But there will be the equivalent thing to do, won't there? I always think of those people who look after, like, I can remember when my mum was so very poorly and she couldn't, you know, look after herself, her own sort of toiletry needs and, you know, people who work in care homes and think, what a, I mean, I know not everybody does it just as an act of love and kindness, but an awful lot of them do the most menial tasks, the kind of tasks that we would find really difficult to do.

But that's the call, to do the lowly thing for the sake of others. Even speaking to one another, there were psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. You know, what I love about our church is I love the fact that I have WhatsApp.

[28 : 24] And I know sometimes it pings a bit too much and sometimes I miss it for a day and I've got 430 waiting to read. But it's great to wake up to a verse of Scripture or somebody to have shared a hymn or a song or just people to say, I'm praying for you now.

What a great thing. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. It's a very modern way of doing it. Paul would have no idea about WhatsApp. But this idea of the church being together and using Scripture and using praise as a means of encouraging one another, well, that's just fantastic.

Offering hospitality without grumbling, honoring one another above yourself. The attitude which is compassionate and gracious, an atmosphere of love.

It's a very tangible way, isn't it, to support and help each other and to encourage each other. Now, I love the fact that Jesus says when his mother and his brothers and sisters came to him to take him away because they thought he was mad, and then he said, who is my mother and brothers?

These around me are. And there was something very special about that. Next slide, please. John Mark Comer says, in Scripture, Jesus redefines by turning the idea of family as merely blood relatives on its head.

[29 : 50] Jesus has brought us together as a new family of God no matter how different we may be from one another. We were made to live in community. And as followers of Jesus, our goal is to live in deep-rooted community that is equally honest about the challenges and hopeful about the beauty of such an endeavor.

Rooting ourselves in the Christian community is essential to encouragement. It's essential.

Supportive, caring, compassionate love is the way people walk with Jesus in a truer and more resolute fashion.

I would not have got through this Christian life without the church. simply wouldn't because I'm too weak in myself. And, you know, even if it's just like, you know, I've been missing two or three weeks and somebody says, oh, we've missed you at church.

It's kind of hard, that, isn't it? Because you say, if I say that, it sounds like I'm having a go at them. But actually, the writer of the Hebrew says, don't give up meeting together as is the habit of some, but encourage one another while it is there.

not because you just want them to be in their place in church, but because you know the church is necessary in our walk with Jesus.

[31 : 18] Very, very few could ever live solitary, lonely Christian lives. It is not the way God intends it to be. So we need to encourage one another and I'm just going to say a few words about the second thing.

We need to edify one another. Now, the word, it's very simply related. To encourage one another is to get alongside. To edify, oikodomeo means to build a house.

Oikos is house. Domeo means to build, to construct. So when you edify a person, you are building a house.

You are constructing something. When you edify yourself, you are building your own spiritual house. The Holy Spirit cooperates with you and you build a house that is honorable to the Lord. It's interesting how often Paul uses this word. He uses it a lot. He talks about our being temples of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit dwelling within us to make us into a spiritual house in Ephesians chapter 2.

[32 : 29] That's a wonderful idea. Now, imagine if the Lord was coming to your house for New Year's Eve. You'd get it ready, wouldn't you? You'd make sure you had everything in place.

You'd make sure it was a place fit for Him. Well, that's a way to view it. The Christian life is we are building our house fit for the Lord to dwell in.

But it's more than that. When we help each other grow in the Christian life, we are building houses. We are edifying one another. We are part and parcel of that construction work that brings people to that place that God wants them to be.

It's another reason why we can't live this Christian life alone. We get together. We interact with each other. We support one another to help build each other up, to build each other's houses.

And, you know, you see it. You know, when somebody who is house proud, and there's nothing wrong with being house proud. It's a good thing. Somebody who's been house proud, you know, got distinctive personalities, they put their imprint on a house, don't they?

[33 : 40] You know, I know some of you, I've visited your houses, and I, when I sometimes comment, and I say, well, I can tell you've had an influence on this decor.

There's something imprinted there about that personality. But, you know, you can see that in the Christian life as well. When I was first converted, my pastor, Mungo Stein, in glory now, he left his imprint on me.

You could have heard me talk, or witnessed me walk, and seen him. It's the way it ought to be.

Follow me as I follow Christ, Paul says. A faithful believer leaves his imprint on those who follow after him, because they have helped construct that house.

You need to become like your teachers, the right of the Hebrews, says, some of you are still babies, you still need milk. It shouldn't be like that. You should have grown now. Follow me as I follow Christ.

[34 : 48] This is an amazing and awesome responsibility that we each have responsibility for one another to build each other up, to construct the house that makes this person look more like Jesus.

So build each other up. Edify one another. As we grow in our Christian faith here in 2024. As a church, we are a community trying together to fulfill the great commission that Jesus left us with.

As we gently press into each other and we form one united thing, his church, as we work together, sharing the space God gives us to do his work, we all become shaped a little differently.

We all become a little more like him. So let us encourage one another and build each other up just as indeed you are doing.

Amen. And we both