

TODAY'S SCHEDULE:

9AM



11AM



EVENTS:

- 1/7/18 Congregational meeting @ 9AM. Please make it a priority to come to hear our shepherds give the plans for our spiritual growth in 2018.
- 1/21/18 Bob Buchanon Visiting

WELCOME GUESTS!

If you are visiting with us and have any questions about what you have seen or heard today, please fill out a visitor's card or ask to talk to one of our shepherds. Our desire is to give you a biblical answer about the things that we believe and practice.

ENCOURAGEMENT

BY ROGER SHOUSE

"Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing." (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Encouragement is a vital and key component of our relationship with one another. One writer called encouragement, "oxygen for the soul." Let's take a look at some important facts about encouragement.

First, everyone needs encouragement. Some are naturally more upbeat and positive than others, yet they too, need encouragement. The journey can be long. The weight and responsibility that some carry is heavy. Some are so busy encouraging others, that their bucket runs empty. It's easy to see some who need encouragement. The young in faith need it to keep going. Those going through tough times need it. There are those who are dealing with long health issues and they need encouragement. There are families that have prodigals and that has broken their hearts. But preachers also need encouragement. Shepherds need encouragement. There really isn't anyone that doesn't need it from time to time.

Second, encouragement lets others know that they are not alone. That is one of the catastrophic results of discouragement. A person feels alone. The problems seem so great. The nights seem so long. Whispers that no one cares fills the heart. A person can feel alone in a church full of people. The darkness of discouragement can crush a person. Encouragement is more than nice words, it's presence. It's being there. It's sitting with a family in the surgery waiting room. It's showing up at the funeral home. It's taking food to a new mom. It's inviting a family over to the house. 'We are with you' is the sound of encouragement. Even when wrong choices have been made, I've seen court rooms filled with brethren, there to support a family whose child is on trial. That is the key to our fellowship. We are "fellows" in this together. Linked in heart and arm in arm, together we weather the storms that come upon us. It may be your turn now for help, but the next time, it might be my turn. Praying together. Sitting together. That wonderful feeling that warms the heart when you see a fellow Christian walk into the room, just to sit next to you.

Third, encouragement is soul strengthening. It's more than cute sayings and quotes that are cross stitched on pillows. Encouragement takes a person back to Christ and His word. It's reminders. It's promises of God that have been forgotten. It's verses shared. It's much more than having a brighter outlook. It's not just optimism, it's keeping someone on this spiritual journey that we are on. It's staying in the spiritual fight. It's not giving up, on God, His word, or His people. It's helping someone realize that God is greater than our problems. It's helping them know that our problems stay on this side of life. Encouragement is spiritual. It's helping someone get stronger in their faith and more dedicated in their commitment to the Lord. Encouragement is Bible based.

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Fourth, some are better at this than others. Some are just natural at knowing just what to say and knowing just how to say it. Some can lift the darkest spirit and find ways to pump oxygen back into that soul. Others have had to learn, watch and develop as encouragers. Learning when you have said enough. Learning when to be silent. Learning what Scriptures are really helpful to use in different situations. All of this comes from simply being encouraged and then learning to help others. What worked for you? What did others do for you? There is a time and a place for encouragement. Often, in the church building isn't the place. Too many people. Not the right atmosphere to really help. A smile. A hug. A 'great to see you,' works well in the church house. But later, coming to a person's home, with a plate full of cookies, or a warm meal, then might be the best setting to really support, comfort, remind and help someone. Walk in their shoes. It will help you think about what you ought to say. When a person is hurting, they don't need a sermon. They don't need fingers pointing at them in blame. When Elijah was in the cave, hiding and scared, there was an earthquake, but God wasn't in the earthquake. There was a fire, but God wasn't in the fire. There was a strong wind, but God wasn't in the strong wind. Then a gentle breeze, and it was out of that, the Lord spoke to Elijah. He didn't condemn the prophet. He didn't scold him. He didn't preach to him. He encouraged him. He reminded him. He helped him. The backseat driver in us says, "You should have done this instead..." Well, that's a little late now. Here we are. We have to deal with what is before us. The blame game only adds on more guilt. It doesn't lift the soul. It doesn't breathe oxygen into a heart that is discouraged. There is a time for the "lessons learned from all of this," but not now. Now is the time to get a person back where they need to be. Embarrassed. Ashamed. Discouraged. Wanting to quit. This is the time to reach out, as the Lord did, and help sinking Peter, as he was walking on the water. Reach out your hand and pull a person up. Reach out your hand and be there for them. That's what encouragement does.

Fifth, we are encouraged in different ways. For the weary preacher, it may be telling him to just take a day off. That's hard for some of us. For others, it may be an intense process, involving many hours of going to their home and working with them. Some just need that gentle reminder. Some need loads of help. I met a man recently who was dealing with a death in the family. I told him about death merely being a door, a process that takes us into the next room. The righteous want to be in the next room. As I talked, I saw his eyes lift up and the color come back into his face. It was what he needed to hear. The pain was still there, but it wasn't so bad. He now had hope. He had a way to express it to the rest of the family. So, our encouraging others is not "one size fits all." Some need just a little. Others need a lot. For some, it's just being there. For others, much more is required. Each of us are different and our problems are different and our faith is not at the same place. So, the encourager understands this. Each person needs different means of encouragement. It's not one size fits all.

This is something that the world misses. The world doesn't have this. I've seen the family alone in the funeral home. I've seen the person sitting alone in the surgery waiting room. Scared, uncertain, and without faith. For the child of God, nothing beats an amazing church that is there for them. Arm in arm, linked together in our journey, we have one another. We have each other's back. We will not leave any upon the field. There is such warmth, hope and love with this. This is what makes a fellowship special. The closer a church becomes, the greater the help and the encouragement will be.

Our verse ends, "just as you also are doing." The Thessalonians were encouraging. Paul was encouraging them to keep encouraging. You're doing it. Keep it up. It's making a difference. Don't give up. Don't get weary in what you are doing. You are making a difference!

NEW YEARS RESOLUTIONS:

This is the time of the year that we are making goals for the following year. Many will resolve to eat better. Many will dedicate themselves to exercising more consistently. These are great things to work on in our lives. Can I encourage you to add one more thing to your list of resolutions/goals for next year? From the great hymn, *I Am Resolved* by Palmer Hartsough, can you make these words your goal for 2018: "I am resolved no longer to linger, Charmed by the world's delight, Things that are higher, things that are nobler, These have allured my sight." Resolve to draw near to God. Resolve to spend more time in His word. Resolve to call upon Him more in prayer. Make 2018 your best year of growth yet as a disciple of Jesus Christ!