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Encourage, Instruct, and Spur On One Another

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Encourage, Instruct, and Spur On One Another

A congregation does not thrive on a foundation of superstars. The passages below call everyone into the foundational work of building each other up. It is not solely the leaders' work. In the Church everyone encourages, teaches, and motivates everyone else, and should do so with the warmth and equality of teammates. No one in our congregations is more important than another but everyone shares the important responsibility of encouraging.

Runners in a relay race do this. Though equal as teammates, they instruct each other as they practice. During a race, they are each other's strongest supporters, yelling encouragement, urging every last ounce of exertion from their teammates. Then, when the baton is passed, they run, feeding off the encouragement of the ones they were moments before encouraging.

Each individual competes, encourages, and instructs in a manner unique to them. But they are united by a common goal; a purpose accomplished through their unique contributions in the service of something bigger than any of their individual efforts.

I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another. (Romans 15:14)

Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. (2 Corinthians 13:11)

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. (Colossians 3:16)

After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:17-18)

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. (1 Thessalonians 5:10-11)

But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. (Hebrews 3:13)

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

The passages above are clear that the point of cheering each other on is not just positivity or personal enrichment. We run on a team with every other Christian in the world, and we rally each other to run the race well, now, today. But our encouragement and motivation spring from our solid hope that one day we will see Jesus face to face. That hope is strong enough to help us persevere, even thrive, no matter the struggle or obstacle.

This hope should not dismiss or minimize the challenges we face. Christians are sometimes guilty of trite encouragement where we think that because our future is secure our present realities shouldn’t matter. But it is because our pain, temptations, and discouragement are real that the call to persevere is needed. It is when our energy is spent, our will eroded, or our resources exhausted—when we have nothing left to depend on save God—it is in the reality of that moment that we most need one another’s encouragement, literally, bringing forth courage. That courage is anchored, not in the mess of our lives, but in the truth that “He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.” (1 Thessalonians 5:10)

We don’t encourage, teach, and motivate ourselves—this is communal work. We put an arm around one another to draw each other into worshiping and depending on our God. We cheer each other on so we remain focused on the goal of running our race well today and finishing in the arms of our savior.

Some Challenges

1. Think about encouragement and instruction you’ve given to others over the past two weeks. Did it build the other person up and spur them on? Or conversely, did it leave them with another expectation they’ve failed to meet, another trite saying

that dismissed their struggle, or another surface-level interaction that left them more alone in their reality?

2. Continuing to think about encouragement and instruction you've given, did you take their reality seriously? Were you motivated to interact by curiosity (i.e. the oft-used cover for Christian gossip: "I just want to know how I can pray for you"), confidence you could fix them ("well all you need to do is..."), or judgment ("Well, just stop.")? Or, was your encouragement in the spirit of the passages above where your encouragement humanized them through your presence and focused on the strong hope that "we may live together with him?"