

# Encouragement

by John McGregor

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of being a people of action and demonstrating faithfulness and encouragement through our actions.*

**Duration:** 33:44

**Scripture:** John 9:35, 2 Timothy 1:13-17, Hebrews 10:22-25

**Topics:** "Encouragement"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares personal experiences and anecdotes to emphasize the importance of encouragement in the lives of believers. He talks about his charitable organization, Free Grace Ministries, and how a group of individuals visited seniors' homes to bring joy and companionship. The speaker also shares a story of facing criticism during a crusade and feeling alone, but finding encouragement from a fellow believer. He concludes by urging listeners to start a revolution of encouragement and highlights an Ikea advertisement that portrays the power of uplifting words in a relationship.

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## Transcript

2nd Timothy chapter 1, beginning at verse 13 and down through 18. And we're still thinking about a people of action, and that's our theme for the fall. And the Word of God says in 2nd Timothy 1 13, hold on to the pattern of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Guard through the Holy Spirit, who lives in us, that good thing entrusted to you. This you know, all of those in Asia have turned away from me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes. May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chains.

On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he diligently searched for me and found me. May the Lord grant that he obtained mercy from the Lord on that day. And you know how much he ministered at Ephesus.

Father, this is your Word, and as we are gathered, we are longing, Father, for a touch from your Spirit, through your Word, to our hearts. And as we think of the Scriptures this morning, we ask that you would just take them. Father, that you would make it so practical in our lives, that we would not just receive the information, but that it would become the very Word of God that changes us on the inside.

And so we want to surrender these moments to you, and ask you to speak to us. In Jesus' name, amen. If you think about the theme of a people of action, you never run out of people in Scriptures of action.

I'm just gonna take an action at the moment. There are so many wonderful things about the people of God, and they've always been a people of action. And as you think on the theme with me this morning, there are things that we see all the time.

The people of God sometimes take action by being compassionate. Things like Malawi, and so on. Sometimes, excuse me, it's feeding the hungry.

And next week in our Thanksgiving service, we'll be tying in with World Relief and the work that they do through CAMA, our Christian Missionary Alliance active wing that works in those kind of settings in the world. Sometimes it's as simple as loving those who are hurting. And you know, in fact, the church has introduced to our society things that they never get credit for.

Things like hospitals and schools, and the caring and teaching kind of places didn't come because of the world, they came because of the church. Because God's people have always been a people of action. Just thought I'd get mine in there a little bit.

But I want to just look at one person of action because there's one action that is so missing today. And I want to just dwell on it for a few moments before we meet at the Lord's table this morning. And it's this man with a funny name, Onesiphorus.

You know, I love this guy because I've encountered a few of them in my life. And they're amazing. They have such an impact.

And let's just look at the subject of encouragement. That's an action. And if I were to ask you this morning, is there anybody here in our Glencairn body today and you really don't want any encouragement? Now I don't see those hands.

You see, it's one of those living things that we all need. And yet so often it is missing, we're busy, and we cannot go by it. But one of the people in Scripture who's a person of action, Onesiphorus, just in these few verses we see some things about encouragement.

First of all, as you look at verse 16, you see that encouragement brings refreshment. And again, who would say, I don't need any refreshment? And there are times in all of our lives when spiritually things grow a little dry and it's not quite as up as we wish it once was, but it's encouragement that brings refreshment to Paul. He's the guy who wrote about a third of our New Testament under the influence of the Holy Spirit, but Paul here is in prison.

I'm not sure he would go, woohoo, but that's where he is, for preaching the gospel. And he says so clearly in verse 15, you know everybody turned away from me. He's been deserted by his friends, by those that he would have looked to to really pick him up and to be there.

And again, if I were to ask you, have you ever sensed that kind of experience? Everybody here would say, oh yeah. Yeah, I've had times when I wondered if anybody was there. And as you continue to look just at verse 16, you see though as he's speaking, his mind is calm because his faith is not shaken.

Yes, people have deserted him, but he is still quite calm, even though he knows that the end of his prison life is probably going to be death. There's a wonderful thing here that just comes to me as I read verse 16, and as he says, there's one who didn't forget. There's one.

This man, Onesiphorus, he didn't forget. Others may have been too busy, they may have had all kinds of reasons for not being there, but despite all the turning away, this man, Onesiphorus, is there. Now, isn't that really the definition of friendship? A friend is somebody who is there even though there can be all kinds of problems surrounding that individual.

A friend is somebody who is there no matter what the conditions may be. Onesiphorus is a man just like that. And as you think about this, have you had that kind of experience where you're feeling maybe a little down, things haven't gone the way that you thought that they should, and as you're sort of licking your wounds from the school day or the work week or the family circumstance or whatever it may be, there is one that walks in there and just sort of knows your very heart and soul.

I'll tell you what an experience that is. It's absolutely incredible. I was directing a crusade for the Billy Graham people in a major Canadian city some years ago, and we had some trouble, and there was lots of criticism, and not that Christians ever over-criticize, but you know it happens, and there was lots of negativity.

Well, why didn't we do it this way, and we should have done that, and we could have done this, and I had an invitation on the closing Sunday of that campaign to go and preach in a small Brethren assembly, and I saw the various preachers out to go to other churches and so on, and as I went to this little assembly, there's about 30 or maybe 35 people there, and you know in my heart I knew the Lord wanted me to preach, I knew I was there, I was seeking to be obedient and so on, but in my heart I was saying, Lord I feel so alone in this, and the criticism and so on sort of hangs around my neck, so Lord would you give me the joy to get up and talk about Jesus as he really is, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, and as I got up to preach, I looked on, and here is Steve Musto, he is the service leader in those crusade services, and I thought, what in the world is he doing here? He didn't know where I was going, and I said to the people, huh, we're honored, we have the service leader Steve Musto is here today, and he said, can I just say a word? Sure. He said, you know, I just wanted to come and say a word of encouragement to my friend. Oh, I tell you, I preached for 50 minutes.

What was it? It was the effect of that encouragement. Onesiphorus is a man like that, and I would say, oh God, strike me with it, you know, and strike us with it, because we live in a world that constantly knocks people down, puts them down, presses them off to the side, marginalizes them, and I don't want to be part of an assembly like that. I want to be part of a body like this that cares about people.

Secondly, would you notice with me from the text that encouragement is not ashamed of the circumstances? Onesiphorus knew that Paul was in prison, but he is still out there, and he's part of that greater kingdom and the greater kingdom work. Jesus is part of this group of encouragers. Do you remember when Peter blew it? I don't know him! What was Jesus' response? I don't know him either.

No, that would be Irish. Jesus sent an angel to the women on the day of the resurrection to say this, Go and tell my disciples, and Peter, don't you love it? Thomas, I'll never believe in him unless I put my finger in the hole and in the spear mark in his side. Jesus, as I said, not an Irish pastor.

He didn't walk into that upper room a week later and grab him by the throat and say, Dummy, here I am! He just said, Thomas, don't be doubting, believe. You see, encouragement goes beyond the circumstances, far beyond them. These little statements that just do so much and have such significance in life are so desperately needed today, don't you think? You know that same crusade where I went and preached in the Brethren Assembly? Out of the Christian Life and Witness classes, a deacon from a big

Baptist church qualified to be a counselor.

And he took his wife on the last Sunday to the meeting, and the place was packed, so he went early to get a really good seat right in front of the platform. And as he came in with his wife, and they sat in a section right in front of the platform, a guy off the street walked in and sat down right beside him. The guy, well, let's just say that Old Spice was not a friend of his.

There was a terrible odor, and my deacon friend said to his wife, God will forgive us, let's move. So they moved over two sections, and he sat down again. Would you believe the guy got up and walked over and sat right down beside him again? You think God doesn't know what he's doing? Sure he does.

And the guy moved again, now he's away around the side where he can hardly see the platform at all. But there he is with his wife, and that homeless guy got up and walked and sat right down beside him again. In the Christian parade, all through the service, Lord, please don't send him forward because I don't want to have to counsel with him.

Guess who was one of the first people to answer the response that day? Yeah, that guy right off the street. And as he goes, he come to the front, and he just fell on his knees and started to weep. And my counselor deacon friend said to the Lord, I don't want to go.

Go. But Lord, I don't want to go. Go.

But Lord, you know, I don't want to talk to him. Go. But Lord, he's on his knees.

Get on yours. As he got down and got on his knees beside the guy, he felt the Holy Spirit saying to his heart, put your arm around him. He said, God, you're kidding me.

I don't want to be this close to him. I don't want to touch him. He put his arms around the guy.

The guy went to pieces. But the deacon got to lead him to the Lord Jesus. You know, the circumstances weren't very good there, but real encouragement goes beyond that, and God wanted to encourage that man that day to the cross, and it changed his life.

And if you've ever been in Calgary and visited a ministry called the mustard seed, it's where people from the street come and they are saved and find life and begin to walk with Christ and serve him and go out to be a very productive part of society. How did it come about? It came about because of one deacon who wasn't all that keen to start out with, but who eventually got it together with God and encouraged that man that nobody wanted to the cross. I better hasten.

Look back with me at the text. Notice encouragement searches out the downcast. He says, on the contrary, when he, Onesiphorus, was in Rome, he diligently searched for me and found me.

It wasn't that he didn't have to put out a lot of effort. He had to actually go and look and find, search for him. Just like Jesus in John chapter 9 and verse 35, you'll find that Jesus discovers a man who's been put out of the synagogue.

He's a man that Jesus healed and he's been kicked out because of his testimony for Christ. And who is it that goes to find him? Jesus. And as Jesus finds him, he reveals himself to him.

It's a beautiful passage. For time's sake, I won't take us there this morning, but just think. Here is this encouragement that searches out the downcast.

I'm gonna ask you to do something this morning before even you go downstairs for potluck. There's a fear in our society that if you really reach out, people will say you're too gushy. I want to tell you something.

Most of us are longing for a word of encouragement. And today, we could start a revolution. Have you seen the ad for IKEA on TV? I love it.

The guy comes home from work and he's saying, what a day! I hate my boss. I hate my job. I'm so sick and tired.

And all of a sudden, this lovely music starts to play. And she is hearing him say, you know, sweetheart, I'm so blessed that you made this meal for me. Oh, my darling, I appreciate just what you've done to look so beautiful for me.

Oh, my sweet one, I'm so excited to get the night with you tonight. Just the two of us. It perfectly illustrates exactly what I'm getting at.

In the world, there's all this crud, and it's all about me. It's like a couple that I talked to one night, and I said to him, when did you last say I love you to your wife? He said, she knows that. I said, when did you get married? Seven years ago.

I said, so seven years ago, you told her that you loved her? He said, if there's any change, I'll let her know. I would say she needed some encouragement, wouldn't you? That's the kind of thing. Encouragement searches out the downcast.

And as you think about this, just keep your finger there in Timothy and go back over to the Acts of the Apostles for a moment, chapter 23. And let me just show you again the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is an encourager par excellence.

In Acts chapter 23 and verse 11, here's what it says. The following night the Lord stood by him and said, have courage, Paul, for as you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you will testify in Rome. Paul was sitting there thinking, it's done, it's over, I'm finished.

And Jesus walked into that cell and said, buddy, have I got news for you. Sorry, that's a McGregor paraphrase. You see, there's so much that the Lord would have every one of us do, and this action of encouragement just has such an impact.

I used to have a charitable organization called Free Grace Ministries, and when I went to work for the Billy Graham people, I wasn't doing my own evangelistic services quite so much, and so it was just sitting there. And in Victoria, British Columbia, when we did a crusade, there was a group who decided they would take and go into all the seniors' homes and just sort of sing, you know, and say hello. And one guy in that group said, is there somebody that I could visit while I'm here? And the matron said, you see that lady sitting in the wheelchair by the window? We get her up in the morning, we put her clothes on, we feed her breakfast, we try to feed her through the day.

At nighttime, we take her back to her room, we take her out of the wheelchair, we put her night clothes on, we put her in bed. The matron said, I've been here seven years and I've never seen a visitor, and I know

her family lives in this city. And the guy said, I went over and I stopped at the window where she was sitting and I said, I just came over to say hi and wanted to talk to you for a minute or two.

And he said, the lady went like this, and he realized she was turning her head away not because she didn't want to listen to him, but because she was crying. Seven years, nobody had bothered to be an encouragement. There it is.

Encouragement searches out the downcast. Encouragement demonstrates faithfulness. Look at verse 18.

May the Lord grant that he obtained mercy from the Lord on that day. And you know how much he ministered at Ephesus. You see, Onesiphorus wasn't just an encourager on Sundays, he made a lifestyle out of it.

An absolute lifestyle. Paul is saying, you know what this guy has done. It has been there all the way through his life and ministry.

God is so faithful, and encouragement demonstrates faithfulness. What legacy will you and I leave? Now I am a little older than most of you, and so I feel the liberty to ask that question this morning. And you know, it's a question that I've been thinking about for a while.

What legacy will I leave? Years ago, I thought my legacy would be that I would be the forerunner for David Beckham, because I was going to be a soccer great. And as I climbed the ladder and got to play in the Irish League Division One, I said, ah, next step, Europe. And three weeks later, the team boss said, we don't need you.

And you know, I thought my legacy would be maybe as a writer. The books I could write! The problem is I haven't had the time to write any of them yet. And I thought, well, maybe my legacy would be as a great preacher.

And you know, as I've worked with some great preachers, I just want to say this. There are no great preachers. There's only a great Savior.

When we planted the church out in Alberta some years ago, they farewelled us as we moved on to the next one. And I thought, somebody's gonna say, I remember when you preached about this or you spoke about that. Wasn't one word in that farewell about a sermon.

Not one. Do you know what they said? John, I remember when we were hurting. And you came.

And you were there. You see, it's not always about the big things that we do. It's not even always about the big things that we say.

It's having a heart like Jesus that's just there. One of the guys I used to get when we directed Crusades for Billy Graham was a man to come and teach on prayer. His name was Jack Cousins.

When I think about leaving a legacy, I think about Jack. He had a cleft palate. You know what that means when he talks? He talks with a little extra.

And I'd pick Jack up in the airport after airport after airport, and I'd take him to the hotel where we're staying, and we'd get into his room, and I'd set his suitcase down, and he'd say, it's great to be here. Let's pray. And he dragged me down on my knees beside him, and we would pray till I knew the glory was in

that room.

That is a legacy, friends. That is a legacy. Encouragement demonstrates faithfulness.

Ah, John, hurry up, man. Okay, here we go. Last one.

Encouragement reveals Christ-likeness. Jesus gives our lives significance and acceptance. Those are two things that every human being is longing for, significance and acceptance.

And they're found at the cross of Christ, and they're found in a daily walk with him, just trusting him. Encouraging others reveals Christ in us. So in these days, when so much of Christianity in North America has become driven by the program and driven by the fad and driven by whatever else we decide we want, and we cannot understand why we cannot reach people, could I humbly suggest there is a disconnect, and this thing of encouragement is so missing.

What are we to encourage? Well, in Hebrews 10, 22 to 25, it says, let us do three things. Let us draw near to God. We ought to encourage nearness to God, and I have lots of conversations.

I repent of them because I didn't encourage somebody near to God. Second thing that's in there is keep a strong testimony. Talk about Jesus.

Hold him before people. Stimulate one another, or some versions say provoke one another to love and to good deeds. That's something we can encourage one another to do.

And then there's one other little thing in that passage. Let us not forsake the assembling together. That's church, and that's why we need one another, because we need that encouragement, don't we? You know, when you think about Jesus, he's the ultimate encourager in so many, many things, but let me just quote one last verse as I close before we come to meet at the Lord's table.

Jesus said, come to me, all you that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. You know, so often we run here and there, and we're looking for answers that people should be able to supply, and people don't know very much when you get right down to it. Come to me, Jesus said that.

That's the greatest and strongest encouragement, and as we close our message part this morning, maybe you need a word of encouragement that is beyond what any human being can give you. Oh, how I recommend Jesus. Come to me, he said.

Let's just close our eyes and pray for a moment. Am I speaking to someone this morning, and there's trouble in your home and in your marriage? Encouragement that is led by the Holy Spirit will bring healing to that. Am I speaking to someone in your downcast because of circumstances? Jesus said he'd give you peace, rest.

So in the quietness of this moment, may I just encourage you, open your heart to Jesus. Bring those burdens, maybe you've carried them for years, but bring them to Jesus. Father, I want to pray for us as a body this morning.

Encouragement does so many things. It brings refreshment, it lifts us up, it gives significance and acceptance. I pray, Father, you would teach us how to encourage one another to love and to good works and to a strong testimony and to assembling together to meet with you.

Father, if there's someone this morning in this assembly who has never experienced the rest and the peace that Jesus gives, my dear friend, this morning right where you're sitting, you can come to the one who's given you that invitation, who said, come to me and I will give you rest. He will not turn you away, but you come to him by crying out from your heart to his heart, God, I need you. I recognize that I'm a sinner and I ask you to forgive me for my sin.

Come, take up your residence in my heart. Help me to learn to walk with you. Now, Lord Jesus, as we come to think about the Lord's table, would you continue to minister to our hearts a word of encouragement in Jesus' name, amen.

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