



ONE ANOTHER
Eastertide Devotional 2022
Week of April 3-9

EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL SCHEDULE

The number of the Devotional is in the circle, the date is in the corner.

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ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER

1 Thessalonians 4:18

Therefore encourage one another with these words.

In undergrad, I was a youth ministry major during the mid-nineties. During this time, youth pastors had a particular uniform: Spiked hair, rectangular glasses, soul-patch, and a sweater with a stripe across the chest (the really cool youth pastors had frosted tips). Basically, Guy Fieri with a Bible. At youth ministry conventions, one would see 58 year old guys looking ridiculous trying to act like a twenty-something. I was never one of those cool youth pastors. Another area which I chafed at was the mantra that, to work effectively with youth, you had to encourage them incessantly: “that’s awesome,” “you’re great,” etc. I came at working with youth by way of coaching, and there is a different context to coaching a student. They join your team with the assumption that you know something that they need to know. This allows for criticism without crushing a student. But every coach knows, if all you do is praise, praise, praise, then eventually your athletes will tune you out. You build respect as a coach for praising what they generally do right and holding them accountable for what they do wrong. This separates encouragement from flattery and makes encouragement genuine and meaningful.

In this passage, Paul is trying to encourage the church in Thessalonica in the midst of a difficult season. Many in the church had died, but Paul did not want them to “grieve like those who have no hope.” Instead, Paul offered Biblical truth as an encouragement: that those who died will enjoy a special place of priority when God decides to make everything right. This was not trite platitudes like “time heals all wounds,” or “Heaven needed another angel.” Paul allowed them to grieve because losing those we love is sad. But it is a different kind of sad. It is a sadness anchored in the knowledge that this world is not all there is. It is anchored in a knowledge that those who are in Christ will be vindicated. Paul does not avoid the sadness, but confronts it with truth.

This call to encourage one another is not a call to flattery or empty works like “you’ll crush this,” or “you keep doing you.” Honestly, I get sad when I hear those phrases, like this is the best thing we can come up with. I also get sad when it seems to work, because too many people anchor their hopes in self-affirmation instead of the genuine encouragement offered in Scripture.

BULLD UP ONE ANOTHER

1 Thessalonians 5:11

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

I am at the end of a long road. I began transcribing and editing a number of Jonathan Edwards's sermons on war for publication almost four years ago. I worked with high resolution scans of Edwards's handwritten documents, transcribing his chicken scratch into digital documents. I introduced, proofed, edited, footnoted, and indexed. Last week I received the proof for the book's cover and I was almost moved to tears. On the back cover, four senior scholars (including the director of the Edwards Center at Yale, the president of Beeson divinity, and one of the leading evangelicals in Australia—friends all) provided endorsements. I knew that they appreciated and supported my work, but to read their words made me forget whatever hardship I might have experienced during the preparation of the collection.

I realize we have already covered this “one another,” but it is an appropriate follow up to the 1 Thessalonians 4 passage we tackled yesterday. The Bible tells us that we should be actively involved in “encouraging each other” and, by such encouragement, build up another. There is a difference between building someone up and puffing someone up. Building up prepares them for whatever might come in the future whereas puffing up makes them feel good for a moment. Puffing up is often done so the speaker will come off well whereas building up always ensures that the beneficiary will be better off. This is not building a psychological buttress but a spiritual fortress.

Encouragement can be difficult because people face real problems that often seem hopeless. The context of 1 Thessalonians 5 gives a reason for hope that outweighs any of our problems. Paul states that, while dark days are coming, you are not in the dark. You know that Christ died to be united with you. Now that union may seem distant, but someday we will get to see God face to face. AT the end of this passage, Paul says, “therefore”—based on everything we said about what Christ has done for you—encourage others and build them up. This suggests that we encourage others, not with flattery, but by reminding people facing darkness that Christ has not left them in the dark. We may suffer, but we do not suffer God's wrath.

USE YOUR GIFTS FOR THE BENEFIT OF ONE ANOTHER

1 Peter 4:10

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

It was difficult to leave my cross country team in Richmond. I loved these kids and they seem to love me (or tolerate me lovingly). When I left, the school hired another cross country coach that came from a private contracting triathlon business. About six months after I left, I caught wind that this new coach was developing generic training programs for the team and then charging kids additional fees for more specialized coaching above and beyond the basic plan. I took serious offense to this. A coach paid by an institution has a fiduciary responsibility to his athlete's success and well-being. This kid treated the school team as a potential client pool for his personal business.

In the church, Peter commands to use our gifts to serve others. This is echoed in 1 Corinthians 12 by Paul who claims that our gifts are given to us "for the common good (v7). In this context, Paul states that we are to excel in spiritual gifts for the building up of the church (1 Corinthians 14: 12). Spiritual gifts were never designed for personal use but for the good of the church. This is why Peter specifies that we are "stewards" of God's grace. In this, we are not owners, but caretakers. An illustration of this principle is found in Matthew 25 when Jesus gives the parable of the talents. In this parable, a master "entrusts" money to his servants who were expected to invest it for the good of the master. In the same way, we are expected to invest our gifts for the benefit of the church as stewards of those gifts.

What are your gifts and abilities? Gifts are spiritual in nature while abilities are those skills you excel at. Both are given by God, both are expected to be used unto God, both are to be used to build up the church. Our trustee board is a collection of people with abilities that can be used for the maintenance of the church. People in our church use their gifts of baking, car repair, ESL, etc. Whatever you have, we need it...and so do others.

HMWK: What are your gifts and abilities? How can they be used for the good of the church?

STIR UP ONE ANOTHER TO LOVE AND GOOD WORKS

Hebrews 10:24

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,

Working with Kenyan runners is an amazing experience. Their attitude towards their craft is uniquely unamerican and has proven to be more effective than our culture's approach. A Kenyan will train for years for a particular race—a world championship or Olympic race—and still lose. But they don't seem particularly bothered by it (unless they lose a mzungu...white person). They will say "it was his day today, it will be my day tomorrow." When they lose, they become genuinely inspired by the performance of their competitor. They see their competition as the group of people that moves them towards great things. Success for the Kenyan is not a zero sum game which is one of the reasons they consistently perform so well.

At first glance, there doesn't seem to be much room for competition in the Christian life. We are supposed to love each other, right? But Romans 12:10 is sometimes rendered "outdo one another with honor." This idea of "stirring one another up" is not the language of competition, but it is the language of sport. Our conduct in the Christian life should inspire the lives of others. This type of competition is good and healthy. It sees those in our family as people with value and potential and their ability to realize that potential is dependent, in part, on our ability to stir them up.

This is an unnatural human response. Too often, we feel as if the success of others somehow diminishes our own success. Jealousy, envy, bitterness—all of these emotions cloud our ability to see that there is enough of God to go around. We need to develop, not a natural, but a supernatural response. The response that is only possible when we are fueled by the Word of God and guided by the Spirit of God.

SHOW HOSPITALITY TO ONE ANOTHER

1 Peter 4:9

Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

Our family briefly lived in Charleston SC to attend to my mother who lived there for over 12 years. Charleston often tops the “best vacation spot” lists, however, living there is another matter. The bugs, the smell from the paper mill, the flooding and traffic—Charleston is a city with many issues. However, as you walk through its historic downtown and university district, you will spot pineapples everywhere. In fact, one of the main fountains near the battery is a giant pineapple. These pineapples find places of prominence because they are a symbol of hospitality. However, their hospitality has its limits. If you are a vacationer willing to empty your pockets in their stores, then all are welcome. Interlopers who move from points north are not accepted by most locals. I met some wonderful people in Charleston most of whom were transplants from the north.

Charleston, and many southern locales, have not embraced the deep Biblical meaning of the concept of “hospitality.” In this passage, the command to show hospitality follows a command to love one another. The Greek term for “hospitality” is “philoxenoi” is a combination of a word for “love” (philo-) and “stranger” (xenos) literally meaning to love a stranger. Such love cannot possibly be based on any previous knowledge of the person since he or she is a stranger. It is a blind love no matter who this stranger is. If hospitality includes showing love to strangers, then how much more should it include showing love to those we know in our church family.

So how do we show hospitality? While not explicit in the etymology of the Greek word, hospitality has universally included hosting people in your home, providing for their need to eat and connect. This is not the sole way one shows hospitality, but it has stood at the center of hospitality. In English, the term hospitality derives from the same word as “hospital”: another type of place one enters to get their needs met. If you think you can live out the Christian life in isolation, then this is not the Christian life you are living. If you want to live the Christian life in community with the family of God, then hospitality needs to be a key feature.