

“THE VALUE OF SUPPORT”  
Philippians 2:1-4, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17, Acts 20:1-6  
June 21 & 22, 2025

“In a cartoon some years ago a little guy was taking heat from his sister and friends for a newly found ‘calling’ - patting little birds on the head. The distressed birds would approach, lower their little feathered pates to be patted, sigh deeply, and walk away satisfied. It brought him no end of fulfillment - in spite of the teasing he took from others.

“What’s wrong with patting birds on the head?” he wanted to know.

“What’s *wrong* with it?” his embarrassed friends replied. ‘No one else does it!’

Oh my friends. “If your niche is encouraging, please don’t stop. If is embracing, demonstrating warmth, compassion, and mercy to feathers that have been ruffled by offense and bruised by adversity, for goodness’ sake, keep stroking. Don’t quit, whatever you do. If God made you a ‘patter,’ then keep on patting to the glory of God.”<sup>1</sup> Even if no one else approves, keep on giving encouragement to the downcast, to the hurting, to those who are being crushed by the things of this world. The world is in such need of people building into the lives of others, and there are way too few who are doing it.

In fact, William Barclay wrote such words in his commentary, *The Letter to the Hebrews*. He says, “One of the highest of human duties is the duty of encouragement...It is easy to laugh at men’s ideals; it is easy to pour cold water on their enthusiasm; it is easy to discourage others. The world is full of discouragers. We have a Christian duty to encourage one another. Many a time a word of praise or thanks or appreciation or cheer has kept a man on his feet. Blessed is the (one) who speaks such a word.”<sup>2</sup>

Those are also the words of the Apostle Paul spoke to the people of Philippi, as you heard

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<sup>1</sup> (Chuck Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Ultimate Book of Illustrations*, [Nashville; Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998] pg. 179)

<sup>2</sup> (Ibid.

today in chapter 2, verses 1-4. Paul says, *“therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any common sharing in 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 of one mind”* (Phil. 2:1-2). We are called to be encouragers of one another so that we might be able to face the trials and troubles of today and grow together in our faith in Christ Jesus. It doesn’t take us too long to see the ones who are giving bad news and discouraging others. We are to be the exact opposite - ENCouraging each other so that we might be able to do great things together for the sake of Christ Jesus our Lord.

Encouragement and support can happen everywhere we go. If we have eyes to see and hearts that are open, we can see the desperate need of those around us for lifting up another. It can simply be a warm welcome, or a smile and a “thank you.” It can be a word of appreciation or a compliment to that person, made sincerely to them. It can be a warm embrace to one who is grieving, or a prayer for someone who is troubled. It can be a card or an email sent to a missionary that may feel forgotten, serving in an obscure and difficult place. It could be a phone call to one recovering from surgery. It could be a meal to a man or woman who has just lost their spouse in death. It could be praising one for what they have succeeded in, or supporting one who has tried, but failed miserably. It could be a ride to the grocery or the department store. It could be reaching out to one in an emergency. It can be getting to know and offering to help a single parent trying to hold it all together. There are so many ways that we can encourage each other if we just take our eyes off of ourselves and look to the needs of others.

Let me give you an example of the importance of encouragement. “In the 1996 Olympics, Kerri Strug, the Olympic gymnast, had the weight of the Olympic gold medal for her team on her shoulders. All she had to do was have a successful vault, and the United States team

would get the gold. However, there was one problem. When Kerri did her first vault, she sprained her ankle, and she could barely walk. She fell on the first vault, so she did not get the score she needed for the U.S. team to win. As she sat there on the mat with tears falling down her face, she cried for two reasons. One, she was in pain. And two, there was no way she could make the score to win the victory in this situation. [Everything looked like it was all over, final, defeat looming, disappointment prevalent.]

“But she had another jump. She had another vault. She got up. She felt like giving up, but her coach stood on the sidelines and said, ‘You can do it, Kerri. You can do it, Kerri. I believe in you. You can do it.’

“As she limped to get ready to try to do a vault, she could barely move. She told an interviewer, after the vault, that all she could do to keep going was keep her eyes on the coach. He kept her from focusing on her ankle. This girl was really hurting. She was crying. But she had an encourager who believed in her. She found strength from his encouragement that she didn’t have. Even with the limp, she took off running, and did her flip on the vault. She had to nail the landing in order to win. She had to try to do this with an ankle that was injured. With her coach’s encouragement holding her up, she conquered her impossibility. She earned a high enough score for the U.S. team to win the gold - all because of her coach’s encouragement. Encouragement changes your performance.”<sup>3</sup>

Without her coach, it is doubtful that Kerri Strug could have done what she did. She was so overwhelmed by the pain of her injury that she could have just quit. When asked what was going on in her mind as she prepared to begin the second vault, she said, “Not much. I was on auto pilot. I had learned the vault and done it so many times that I just had to go for it, not over think it, but let it flow through me as my body did what it was trained to do.” But she had to get

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<sup>3</sup> (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations & Quotes*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 85, #233)

beyond the pain in order to do what she was trained to do. The encouragement from her coach gave her the strength to get beyond the hurt and follow through with her jump.

Folks, there are so many people who have gotten injured in some way in their journey of life. They're crying out in anguish and they just want to quit to make the pain stop. But all too often, they're listening to the wrong voices, telling them to give up, to end it all, and to do whatever it takes just to make the pain stop.

That's where we need to step in to become their encouragers. Yes, there is great pain in life that we don't want to face. But with the help of a friend, or another person beside us, supporting us and cheering us through the tough spot to find victory, who knows what is possible?

There are so "many Christians [who] are 'dying on the vine' for lack of encouragement from other believers. [Oh, they belong to Jesus, and are a part of the vine of faith in God, but without support and help from others, they are literally wilting away.] Proverbs 15:23 says, '*A person finds joy in giving an apt reply - and how good is a timely word!*'" Isn't that true? It's a delightful thing to receive a timely word, [to find encouragement through the difficulties of this life]. Proverbs 15:30 says, '*Light in a messenger's eyes brings joy to the heart, and good news gives health to the bones.*' ... [Encouragement] will give you emotional prosperity to make your heart lighter and make the day seem more bearable."<sup>4</sup>

That's what Paul was doing when he wrote 2 Thessalonians. The Christians in that city were being hounded and attacked by the Jews and Paul reached out to them with support, encouragement, and reassurance that their faith was not in vain, but that they are Children of God through their faith in Jesus Christ, God's Beloved Son, and our Savior. Even though some were trying to convince the Christians to change their ways so that they followed alternate versions of

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<sup>4</sup> (Chuck Swindoll, *Swindoll's Ultimate Book of Illustrations*, pg. 178)

Christianity, Paul writes to keep them focused on the Way, the Truth, and the Life found only in Jesus.

Paul knew the hardships of persecution. He knew the temptation to give up his faith. But he also knew that when others stepped up alongside him, he could continue to boldly and truthfully proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ so that others could believe in Him as their Savior. Listen to the account in Acts 20:1-6. (READ Acts 20:1-6)

What was Paul doing with the disciples of Jesus? He was encouraging them to remain faithful to Jesus no matter what. He was helping them to look beyond themselves to see the desperate need of those around them for the saving grace of Jesus Christ. He was calling them to move beyond their own pain and suffering to reach out to the ones who were destined to eternal death without Jesus as their Savior. He was inviting them to continue to be strong witnesses for Christ Jesus in all that they did so that many more could become children of God by putting their faith in Jesus.

After saying goodbye to the disciples of Ephesus, Paul “*set out for Macedonia. He traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people ...*” (Acts 20:1-2). He didn’t berate the Jews for not believing, but continued to reach out to those who would understand and believe Jesus as their Messiah. Both Jews and Gentiles were encouraged to keep the faith, even if they were arrested, tried, condemned and imprisoned. They were to likewise encourage each other so that they would not grow weak and fall away from Jesus.

And Paul wasn’t working alone in this effort to take the Good News of Salvation through Jesus to the people. Look at the friends and colleagues he had working with him; “*Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy also, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia*” (20:4). There were also

Luke, and Silas. They worked together so that none of them would be beaten down so badly that they would give up their faith. They encouraged each other in the Lord so that they could grow the new Christian Church. They had each other's back. They watched out for each other. They worked side by side with each other. And they provided support and care for each other.

Friends, that is what the Church today is to be about, working diligently together to tell everyone about the Truth of Jesus Christ. There are so many people in this world who haven't yet heard about Jesus. There are so many people in this world beaten up to the point of death waiting and longing for someone to come along side of them with encouragement and support and life. There are so many who have lost their way from real faith in Jesus who need to be loved back into the household of faith. The work of the Church is ongoing, and we are called to be a part of it to help bring people to faith in Jesus

You see, it's not just about us knowing about Jesus and putting our faith in Him as our Savior! It's about us reaching out to the world with Jesus to lift up and support and encourage and walk beside everyone so that they might come to faith in Jesus and begin to live for Jesus, too.

"A father and his son were walking on the beach and the boy happened to notice all the starfish lying there. There were hundreds and thousands of them that had been washed up onshore. Of course, they were dying, not being in the water. So they began throwing them back into the water.

After throwing so many starfish back into the water, "soon the boy realized that there were just too many. The boy then said, 'Daddy, there are so many starfish up on the beach. It doesn't matter that we are throwing back a few here and a few there. It doesn't matter, because there's too many of them.'

“His father looked at him, picked up another starfish and threw it into the ocean. ‘It matters to that one.’”<sup>5</sup>

It is true that there are too many people in this world for only a few people to reach with the love and Good News of Jesus Christ. But that’s why Jesus called the Church to “*go and make disciples of all the nations*” (Matthew 28:19). If we are all involved in touching the lives of others with encouragement and love and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it won’t take forever for the whole world to hear and come to know where they can find life. It’s up to all of us to be a part of the work of the Church.

You have people in your life that I will never know. You have connections with folks who need encouragement within your own sphere of influence that only you can touch and make a difference in. True, some are called to be the evangelists, boldly taking the Name of Jesus to others who have not yet come to know about Him. But each of us knows people who are hurting, who need support and encouragement, who can appreciate and benefit from our being a part of their lives as followers of Jesus. That’s where we all fit into the picture of the Great Commission - we each do our part, whether cold calling on people who are in need of hearing about Jesus, or just walking alongside those who are desperate for love and acceptance and reassurance and refreshment. All of us are called to become a part of the process of building the church. We might only reach one or two for the sake of Jesus Christ. That’s great. We each do what God has called us and gifted us to do. One person at a time we can work together to build the church together. It matters to the one you work with, one at a time.

That’s why each week I encourage you to go from here to touch the life of another person for the sake of Jesus Christ. There are so many hurting and lost people in the world, too many for only a few to reach. But if you touch the life of two people, and they touch the lives of two

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<sup>5</sup> (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, pg. 85, #232)

others, and they touch the lives of two others, you've now touched the life of 14 people. You, doing your part to encourage and uplift and pour into two people suddenly multiplies into 14. And if those 14 people each invest into the lives of just two others, you've then touched the lives of 30 people with the love of Jesus Christ. It's not addition we're talking about, but multiplication for the sake of Jesus. Take a look at what I mean.

This is a very small map of Paul's influence into the lives of others. Each of them touched the lives of others, and they touched the lives of others. It started with Paul and in three "generations" of influenced people, it blew up into 35 other contacts that were touched with love and compassion and encouragement and salvation. That's how the early church grew so fast - they all participated in the building up of one another and the Church exploded to life.

Now, think of how this could work here in this church. Say there's (25) 60 of us here today. You encourage 2 people, who encourage 2 more people, that's (150 people) 300 people who have been encouraged! That's exponential! And if we do that same thing with sharing our faith with another to help them grow in faith in Jesus, this church would be filled up in a big hurry. That's Bible math. The only question is "Will you be a part of this calculation?"

Father, thank You for Your call in our lives to be faithful encouragers for Christ. Thank you for those people in our lives that we can believe in, lift up, build into and grow deeper in their faith. Give us the courage to trust You first, then to be willing to touch the life of even one more so that they might get excited about knowing You and living for Jesus throughout their lives. You will take it from there. Thank You, Lord, in Jesus' Great Name we pray. AMEN.