

Encouragement

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Good Morning Friend,

Again at this time of the year, the Christmas classic film, IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE, has frequently been shown on American television. It has become a holiday tradition. The opening scene carries a memory that I don't want to forget. The fictional scene is in heaven. Clarence, a second-class angel, is given an assignment to leave heaven briefly for a mission to earth. He is told specifically to visit and help George Bailey. The assignment sounds urgent so Clarence asks his senior angel this question . . . *But why? Is he sick?* The senior angel says . . . *No. It's worse than that . . . he's discouraged.*

Is there anything worse than discouragement? It is a hopelessness that inevitably leads to some degree of paralysis of the spirit. It is possible to live without many things but it is pathetically impossible to live without hope. Yes, it is serious and too common.

Perhaps this is why God provides a way for you and me to be lifted out of the valley of discouragement. David wrote these words in Psalm 3:3 . . . *O Lord, you are a shield around me.* You bestow glory on me and you lift up my head. David calls God the One Who lifts up our heads. He is our Lifter-Upper. Certainly you can think of times when He has done that for you. According to the Scriptures, His plan involves at least one or more of the following paths to encouragement.

- **Sometimes He does it Himself.** He comes directly to you. All three Persons of the Godhead are referred to as an Encourager in the Scriptures.
- **Frequently His encouragement comes to us through the Word.** In Romans 15:4, Paul calls the Scriptures *the Book of Encouragement that gives us hope.* So often in a time of difficulty, I have turned to the Book for hope and encouragement.
- **Usually He uses others to minister to you.** And He uses you to be His ambassador of hope and cheer to others. It's an amazing truth that you and I can become His channel to others. So often the Bible says ... *Encourage one another* (Hebrews 3:13, I Thess. 5:11). He uses us **individually** in ministry to each other. He also uses us **corporately** to encourage each other. Joseph, the Levite from Cypress, was given a nickname by his colleagues. It was *Barnabas, the Son of*

Encouragement. God desires each of us to wear this mantle ... to be a Barnabas. Wherever we go, we are to be His encouragers. He uses others to encourage us and He uses us to encourage others.

It's Christmas Eve as I finish writing this letter to you. The theme of this letter fits every day of the year, but maybe especially on Christmas Eve. On the night of His birth, the angels announced peace and joy. As He grew into ministry, He promised the same . . . peace and joy through Himself to others. He promised "abundant life" and He spoke these encouraging words to heavy-hearted people . . . *Take heart.* He still does.

Friend, in your counseling and in your preaching, be generous in offering hope to others. Early in my college career, our chapel speaker, Pastor Koval, said to us, *Many of you are preparing to serve the Lord. Whenever you speak to an audience, remember you are speaking to people with broken hearts. Ask God to use your words, your gestures, and your face to minister hope to your listeners.* Such good advice, then and now.

One of our staff members recently ministered at Heartstream Resources. He especially appreciated this song which they often sang together.

Lord, I come into your presence and I bear to you my scars, some received in private battles, some received in holy wars; some were even self inflicted, but no matter how they came, I now bear them all before You, to the honor of your Name. All my wounds cry "Alleluia." All my bruises honor You. Every scar is but a trophy of the grace that brought me through. And the tears I've wept before You (when I did not understand) are now diamonds of redemption sparkling in your nail scarred hands.

Be encouraged,

Lareau Lindquist