

# Encouragement in the Ministry

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What discourages you in ministry? If I asked everyone here this morning to list five things that discourage you as you seek to minister to your flock, I would imagine there would be some variety in the answers. We are not all exactly the same. Each of us has different gifts and abilities, different sensibilities and tender spots. We have the same ministry from God, yet there are differences in each of our ministries. Others here today may not face the things that tie your stomach in knots. Yet there would certainly be a great deal of overlap in our answers. In your mind, what did you think of? Undeserved criticism, conflict with members or other workers, a lack of appreciation for all that you do, a shrinking attendance at worship or Bible study, outright rejection of biblical doctrine, people leaving your church to go to the "fun" church, being unfavorably compared to a previous pastor who didn't bother to walk on water—instead he simply parted it and then levitated over the dry land, or maybe it was something else. Anyone care to add to the list?

What encourages you in ministry? When you think of what encourages you in the times you are low, what comes to mind? The couple that is back together again after all the counseling sessions that wore you down, the full church or Bible class, the letters of thanks and appreciation that you keep tucked in the back of the drawer to turn to in difficult times, the words of appreciation for the sermon you preached or the class you taught, the hug you receive from a widow after the funeral service of her husband, the family that was at worship again in their personal pew that had been vacant for a while, the smile on a three-year-old's face as he shakes your hand or gives you a hug after worship, the thought that comes flying into your head in the middle of a sermon, "People are actually sitting up and listening as I share the gospel, how cool is that?" or the empty cross and the empty tomb.

Discouragement and the need for encouragement are a part of our ministries. There is no escaping it. You know it, I know it, and Satan knows it. He will try at times to have us seek encouragement in all the wrong places. He will try to push our attention toward sources of fleeting encouragement that will merely set us up for a bigger fall. Therefore there is great value in spending time today reminding ourselves of things we already know, but at times we may forget. We will look at: 1. The need for encouragement in the ministry. 2. False or fleeting sources of encouragement in the ministry. 3. The source of lasting encouragement in the ministry.

## **The need for encouragement in the ministry**

There is one reason that we need encouragement in ministry. Sin. The people with whom we share law and gospel are sinners. We who proclaim law and gospel are not merely jars of clay. We are also cesspools of sin. You put this mixture together, stir it up, and the result will be many things that cause us to feel discouraged and low in our ministries.

In Psalm 31 David seeks refuge in the LORD. Why? What is it that causes him to flee to the LORD for refuge?

<sup>9</sup>Be merciful to me, O LORD, for I am in distress;  
my eyes grow weak with sorrow,  
my soul and my body with grief.

<sup>10</sup>My life is consumed by anguish  
and my years by groaning;  
my strength fails because of my guilt,  
and my bones grow weak.

<sup>11</sup>Because of all my enemies,  
I am the utter contempt of my neighbors;

I am a dread to my friends—  
those who see me on the street flee from me.  
<sup>12</sup>I am forgotten by them as though I were dead;  
I have become like broken pottery.  
<sup>13</sup>For I hear the slander of many;  
there is terror on every side;  
they conspire against me  
and plot to take my life.

In verses 9-10a David is faced with the weight of sorrow and distress. Although he is not speaking directly about the ministry, these feelings certainly relate to what brings about a need for encouragement in our lives. Distress comes when you are counseling people whose lives are torn apart by sin. Sorrow comes when you bury people you have come to call friends. Distress comes when people need to vent because of the problems in their lives, and we become a ready target.

"My strength fails because of my guilt." A second area that leads to the need for encouragement in ministry is our own guilt. Some of the problems we face are of our own making. We speak in anger at a meeting. We reply in kind to someone who has hurt us with his words. We struggle in relationships within our own staff because we are just as sinful as the rest of the staff. We deal with problems in our homes because we are not perfect fathers or husbands. There are times in our lives when our failings, and no one else's, leave us longing for encouragement.

We get discouraged because God is not working on our timetable. We have planned and labored. We have placed in front of our people cleverly crafted vision statements, mission statements, and statements that explain the purpose of our other statements. We think we have been precise and clear in outlining the big picture of the work God has given us in our little corner of his kingdom. We step back to avoid the rush of people charging out the gates to slay pagans with the gospel. Instead our people respond with a slightly stifled yawn. We have read the right books and we went to the right workshops. We have learned the latest buzzwords that we have been told will change the world. They didn't. In fact all that changed was the latest buzzword. We then become indignant with our people, with the latest books, workshops, and even with God himself. We want things done on our time frame. The Spirit works on his own infinitely wiser timeframe. In reality, we sin in the corners of our heart because we think we know better than God.

Adversaries and the slander of many caused David to flee to the LORD (v 11-13). When this happens to us in the ministry today we see the evidence of sin among our people. They will at times sin against us with unjust, unfounded criticism. Some days I wonder if every congregation has a person who possesses a Bible that has an extra verse in Romans 12, a verse 8.5 that lists attracting all the comments of critics in the congregation as a spiritual gift: "If his gift is being a sounding board for all criticism in a congregation, then let him be a powerful magnet." To be sure, not all criticism directed our way is really all that important. Also, not all of it is unfounded, but there are times that it is, and this hurts us. Yes, we have head knowledge of what Jesus told us in John 15, "Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also." Yet it still stings when we are attacked.

In reality, some of the criticism that is directed at us is actually aimed at God, but it is still our rear that gets chewed. "Why can't my cousin Greta sing at my wedding? She has a wonderful voice. Why should it matter that she is Baptist?" "Why can't my son commune here? He was confirmed here! There is no WELS church in his town, that's why he belongs to the Missouri Synod church!" "You just like saying no to these requests. You get a kick out of being mean!" If you have heard some variation of these statements you probably have head knowledge that they were attacking God and his Word. But it sure feels personal at times.

Jesus told us these types of things would come. We know this but we all long to be the great missionary that is going to change countless lives. We picture our ministries being one success after another. But the reality of sin in the people we serve and in ourselves means there will be difficulties. We would do well to recognize that our ministries may well be like the ministry God gave to Jeremiah: "Get yourself ready! Stand up and say

to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you,' declares the LORD" (Jeremiah 1:17-19). With this realization in our heads and our hearts we will not be so quick to follow Satan's urgings to focus on the things that discourage us.

### **False or fleeting sources of encouragement in ministry**

When we lived in Minnesota, we spent two straight Lenten seasons remodeling the parsonage. Lent might seem like a strange time to remodel, but it was when my brother-in-law was seasonally unemployed. He did the majority of the work. It was a blast. I would get home from meetings in the late evening and then work until 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning. Whenever I had a few hours in the day we would work. What made it such a blast, apart from smashing walls with hammers, was that you could see the progress. I could see the results at the end of the week or at the end of the project. In ministry we don't always get to do that. Sure, there are times that we are blessed by God to see his Spirit work in the hearts of people. You know what I mean. There is no greater joy than seeing the person who everyone always said would never darken the door of a church lean over the font as he is baptized. It is a thrill to hear a person say, "I never thought I could get into heaven. I did not think I could live long enough to make up for all the horrible things I did early in life. But now I know Jesus has done it all in my place." I pray we have all had those experiences that lead us to say, "That is what makes it all worthwhile." Seeing God's power at work in the lives of people is a privilege and a joy. But I would offer to you that while this truly is a blessing and a privilege, it is not the source of lasting encouragement for ministry.

I see a danger in finding our main encouragement for ministry in seeing the results of the gospel. What do we do when the results are not so visible? What do we do when we plan a great Bible study series and not many come? What if while we are teaching a class the people stand right outside the door and talk so loud that we have to shut the door so that the few who have come can hear? What if we plan an incredible stewardship Bible study and a sermon series that everyone tells us was wonderful, and then the next month our offerings go down and 20% of our volunteer staff quits? If we focus on seeing the results, we will often get frustrated, discouraged, and bitter. If you want to always see results in your work, then go handout carts and smiley face stickers at Wal-Mart. You will be able to see the result with each sticker that is worn and each cart that is pushed. But if you set your heart on seeing every successful result in your ministry, you may well be setting yourself up for fleeting encouragement. You may be planting the seed, watering it, or gathering the harvest, but only God will make it grow. Like it or not, he is not always going to let you see the results. Rejoice and thank him when he does give you a peek, but do not demand it from him.

We live in a society that is success driven and statistics oriented. We are conditioned to think of success in terms of quantities. The sports page lists wins and losses, not good efforts. Forbes has its billionaires list each year. I have yet to see a list of diligent employees. We often fall into this way of thinking in our ministries. Be honest, which encouraged you more: the overflow crowds of Easter or the crowd on the Second Sunday of Easter? Why is a full church more encouraging to us? Is it because we rejoice that more people are hearing the gospel, or is it because we feel like more of a success? Why does a Bible class of 85 people, with less opportunity for deep discussion than a smaller class provides, feel so much more encouraging? Are we simply looking for better numbers for next year's statistical report? The most enjoyable class I teach right now is a group of about seven people that meet together on Sunday evenings. They discuss God's Word on a deeper, more personal level than any other class I teach. Yet the joy I feel at teaching this class is often not as great as the disappointment I feel when the overall weekly total for Bible Study attendance is down. Why is that? I can tell you why. I am a sinner and sin makes me stupid. It makes us all stupid. At times I worry too much about being "successful." This is never going to be a lasting source of encouragement because the definition of success is always changing. If last year's numbers were successful then anything less this year must mean failure. Then I am in trouble, because I am destined for discouragement. Eventually the novelty of having an overweight pastor is going to wear off for my people and numbers will go down.

Please understand that I am not saying it is wrong to have goals or to pray for God's blessings on our ministries. Set all the goals you want. Work your tail off so that God may work his successes through you. Just be careful not to live and die with quantities. Chasing success is not the answer. Serving God faithfully is always the answer. Find lasting encouragement in knowing that Christ lived and died in our place to overcome our less than faithful efforts. His promises overcome our weaknesses. When God looks at our service in his name and says, "Well done, good and faithful servant," then we are successful in the only way that truly matters.

Another area that provides temporary encouragement is the appreciation of our people. We all want to be appreciated for the work that we do. We have a place in our heart that looks for and longs for appreciation from those we serve. It is encouraging to hear, "That was a wonderful sermon, pastor." It is even more encouraging to hear it from someone who usually never says a word about your preaching. And it is a thrill to hear it from someone who actually was awake. When people offer you praise for your diligent work in a capital appeal, a building project, or they tell you how thrilled you are that the church is full and the membership is increasing, it can be encouraging. We may even answer them by pointing to God as the source of all these blessings. The following Sunday we may even choose the hymn, *Not Unto Us*, so that everyone knows that God is the one producing the results. But somewhere, in the back corners of our mind, do we take some of the credit for ourselves? Does our ego swell with sinful pride when God's people appreciate us? At times, yes.

Appreciation is definitely a form of encouragement. We do well to imitate Paul and thank God regularly in prayer for our co-workers and those to whom we minister. It is also appropriate for us to appreciate the labors of others openly in front of our people. That is God-pleasing. But the danger I see in myself, and maybe it is there in your heart also, is that while I am thanking others who serve, I can become bitter that I am not being thanked, appreciated, or loved. The sinful nature in me wants appreciation focused on what a great guy I am. If my primary source of encouragement in ministry is appreciation from those I serve, then I am feeding steroids to the beast of sinful pride that lives inside of me.

God's people are sinners. At times their sinful nature will lead them to take you for granted. It may lead them to think that providing you with a house or housing allowance is more than enough appreciation. They are struggling with the day-to-day problems that sin brings into their lives as well. They might be so preoccupied that they forget to tell you that they love you and appreciate you. They may actually be telling you that they love and appreciate you, but you don't notice it because one person said something negative about you and that now consumes you.

Being God's representative is the role God has given to us. Being God's replacement is the role that our sinful nature wants. "What did you think of the sermon?" It is an innocent enough question. Yet does this question reveal our ego somewhat? I do not ever recall asking someone, "What did you think about God after hearing that sermon?" Is it because I want praise for myself? Not always, but to be honest, more often than I would care to admit, that is the case. Pride can lead me to chase after results, long for success, and deeply desire appreciation. None of these things *offer* lasting encouragement. In fact, they can lead us away from God if sinful pride takes root.

Pride is a dangerous beast. It can lead us to ignore truths that hurt us. It can lead us to deny our failures. It keeps us from learning from them and moving on in our ministry. Instead pride moves us to point fingers, affix blame, and lament that others are not as faithful and diligent as we are. At times when we feel discouraged in the ministry we will have to take an honest look at ourselves and see if our pride is the cause. If so, then we better get out the big stick of the law and let ourselves have it. Pride is a beast that God's law exposes and God's love for us in Christ overcomes. He forgives our foolishness and lifts up our chin so that we look him in the face as he tells us he loves us and has removed our sin. His forgiveness leads us to want to serve him faithfully and keep pride chained up in our hearts.

### **God's love for us in Christ is the only source of lasting encouragement for ministry**

Luke 10 gives us the example of what earthly success in ministry looks like. The seventy-two had

received their marching orders from Jesus. They had learned they were the lambs and the wolves would be out there to meet them. They learned what to take, where to stay, and when they should shake the dust off their feet. They took what they had learned and put it into practice. In Luke 10:20 we are told, "The seventy-two returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.'" Leadership magazines of the first century must have been all over these guys, urging them to write articles like, "Ten Easy Steps To Light Up Heaven With Satan's Lightning-like Fall." However Jesus' response was somewhat different. He rejoiced with the disciples and urged them on to more faithful service in the kingdom, but then comes the surprising statement, "However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20). Jesus urges the seventy-two and us to see that the greatest source of encouragement is not the results that he enables us to see in our ministry, but the grace he has poured out upon us.

Jesus' perfect life in our place and his death on the cross as the punishment for our sins are not just what we proclaim; they make us who we are. Without Christ as our substitute our ministry is without purpose, without value, and without power. The forgiveness he has won for us makes us worthy instruments of his grace. There will be many times when we will honestly have to say that we were not faithful servants. We did not give ourselves fully to the privilege of service that God has given to us in every instance. We were silent when we should have spoken. We spoke when we should have been silent. We know this. It hurts to reflect on it. Deciding that in the future we will do better, work harder, be more diligent, more faithful and more Christ-like does not take away the pain. It will only set us up for another fall. The only thing that takes away our pain is the knowledge that we have a God who is both just and merciful. In his mercy he took away every last blemish we have brought to his ministry of reconciliation. When I recognize that and rejoice in it through the work of the Spirit, I am moved to want to serve him faithfully with all the strength he gives me. His forgiveness moves me to serve him even when results are not seen, success is not visible to me, and when appreciation is not spoken.

The Father sent Jesus into his public ministry with words of approval and authority that were spoken at his baptism. We have God's words of approval in the gospel. He has made us worthy by removing our sins. We have God's word of authority in the divine call God has extended to us. We are in the exact place that God himself wants us to be. Sometimes I worry that we tread roughly over the doctrine of the divine call. We want everyone to acknowledge God has placed us there when we feel the people are not respecting us. But we conveniently forget this doctrine when we want to whine like little puppies about the terrible situation we are in. In our divine call God has told us he has given these people to us as a gift just as we are a gift to the people we serve. This is an act of his grace. At this point in time God has no better person to serve your people than you. Remembering this truth keeps us from wasting time dreaming of greener pastures where sin is only a memory and every member would appreciate our every breath. There is no such place. Even if there is, unless you are holding a second call right now, God has not given you the gift of grace to serve there. But he has given you the gift of his undeserved love to serve where you are. It is a gift of his love to you. Respond to his gift of love by serving as faithfully as you can.

An important part of seeking to serve God faithfully in response to his love is to view every aspect of our ministry as an act of worship. It is easy to view presiding at the Easter festival service as an act of worship. What about teaching a confirmation class that does not seem the least bit interested in using the gifts God has given to them faithfully? Does that always feel like an act of worship? Or, what about the third committee meeting of the week, the one that is so far off track that a St. Bernard could not find it? Do you feel as though you are worshipping God as you participate in that meeting? Those situations are a bit more of a challenge to the task of offering your whole self to God as a spiritual act of worship. We will find great encouragement in ministry to do our very best when we have a laser-like focus on the truth that whatever we do in ministry we are doing to thank God for his gift of salvation.

It is easy to fall into the routine of ministry. I visit the sick because that is what I do. Sometimes the reason why becomes a little murky. Do I visit the shut-ins because I have to as part of my work? Or, do I do it because they need the gospel and I am able to bring it to them? Or, do I visit them because they need the gospel and I want to bring them the means of grace in order to glorify God who took away my sins? On different days I am certain I would give you different answers. But I can say with absolute certainty that on my best days, those

days when I am thrilled to be alive and serving my Savior, I will give you the third answer each and every time you ask me. Ministry as worship of a loving and gracious God is the best encouragement we can possibly have. It takes our focus off of us, off of those we serve, off of results that may or may not come, and fixes our gaze entirely on God's love for us in Christ. This is the one constant we have each and every day of our life.

Ministering for God's glory keeps us faithful to our God. It keeps us from chasing after platitudes and praise. It helps us to stay focused on God's Word and to do what often is the hard thing to do. It keeps us faithful to God's Word even when that faithfulness is unpopular. If our sinful nature leads us into the trap of longing for the approval of those we serve, we will be led by Satan to find justification for watering down doctrine in the name of noble and pious-sounding love. Satan has many more years of experience lying, than all of us combined have in recognizing his lies. When our eyes stay focused on God's love for us in Christ we will find the strength to do the hard things that can discourage us. Even more, we will find joy in knowing that we have served God faithfully.

When you ride an airplane, you have to watch the flight attendants demonstrate the proper use of seat belts and oxygen masks. They tell you that if an emergency takes place and the oxygen masks drop from the ceiling, if you are traveling with small children, you should first put your own mask on and then after it is secure proceed to help the small children. It goes against every bone in my body as a parent. Yet it is completely obvious why it is so important to do this. I am no good to my child if I cannot breathe. The same thing can be applied to our spiritual lives. I cannot serve God or his people faithfully in the ministry if I do not minister to myself first with the gospel. I need private devotion time. I need time spent in growth spiritually and professionally. If I neglect this I am hurting myself, the people I have been blessed with serving, and I am also not glorifying God in everything I do.

I know you are busy. But how do you respond to your members that are too busy for worship? What do you say to people that need counseling but are too busy? If they need it so do we. In order to find encouragement for ministry I need to be in the Word regularly and to make faithful use of the Lord's Supper. The most encouraging thing I have ever done in my ministry was to go to Summer Quarter at the seminary. The first time I went, I was at a low point in my ministry. I was looking with envy at the guy checking membership cards at the entrance to Sam's Club. Summer Quarter was better than I could have ever imagined. I spent more, time in the library in those three weeks than I did in the whole three years I lived on campus. The work was beyond my ability in some ways, but was it ever a breath of fresh air to stretch myself to get it done. Another incredible thing was the time spent talking with other pastors. Whether it was a break or into the wee hours of the morning, it was great to hear their perspectives on ministry and to encourage them and be encouraged by them with the gospel. I know not everyone can afford to go to summer school. But I am tired of hearing the excuse that my congregation would miss me too much. Brothers, not a single one of us is that important in God's kingdom. Christ ruled before we were born. Christ will rule after we are in heaven. If you believe that you are so vital to your congregation that the gospel will cease to function if you are not there, please get over yourself. There are other valid reasons many cannot attend Summer Quarter, but do not waste my time with this one.

Find a good devotional book to use. Study through a book of the Bible in the original language. Use a study guide and review one of the confessions. Do something to build yourself up so that your focus becomes sharper and clearer on what God has done for you in Christ. Also take the time to make your personal study time a conversation. Let God talk to you through whatever study of the Word you choose. And then talk to him in prayer. Pray specifically and dangerously about the various areas of your ministry. Name names. Ask God to use you even when it is not comfortable. And then thank him when he brings you the blessings that these conversations will bring into your ministry. I am not holding myself up as the model for you to imitate. I am very often lazy and full of excuses when it comes to private devotion time. I can find more time for reruns or the news when I get home in the evening than I do for study. I find more time to make coffee and watch the morning news when I get up early than I really need. I am an idiot when it comes to this at times. I know better, but I still do worse. Yet, I also know I am forgiven for my neglect of my own soul by the life and death of Jesus. That moves me to keep working at doing better in this area. The better I do in my private devotions, the more

encouraged I am to minister faithfully.

We get to spend hours digging into the Word and applying it to ourselves. We then get to take it to our people and apply it to their hurts, anxieties, fears, and joys. Then we get the incredible privilege of having someone in a Bible class point out a truth that we entirely missed. We are doubly blessed! During the whole time that we get to repeat this cycle someone is writing a check with our name on it every two weeks or so. What an amazing gift God has given us!

Yes, your people will be unfair, uncharitable, and unrealistic at times. Get over it. God did. He still created, redeemed, and sanctified them at a greater cost to himself than you and I ever will pay. Love them because God loves them and he loves you. Kick sinful pride out of your heart with God's gospel. Drive away despair as you revel and rejoice in the amazing fact that you and I get to share God's love with everyone from infants to their great-great grandparents. We get to do the greatest, noblest task on this side of heaven. Yes, we will stumble and fall at times but God's grace is greater than our failures. He will lift us up, and every now and then he will give us the privilege of seeing him do more than we can ask for or imagine—even when he has to do it through frail vessels like you and me. To him be the glory.

### **A Brief List of Encouraging Passages**

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go. (Joshua 1:9)

Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. (Psalm 19:12)

The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. (Psalm 103:8-14)

When I called, you answered me; you made me bold and stouthearted. (Psalm 138:3)

He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me. (Luke 10:16)

However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven. (Luke 10:20)

I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. (Romans 1:11-12)

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (Romans 5:1-5)

Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Corinthians 3:5-6)

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. (2 Corinthians 4:7-9)

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. (Galatians 1:8-10)

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3:7-11)

On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. (1 Thessalonians 2:4)

He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. (2 Thessalonians 2:14-17)

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself. (2 Timothy 2:8-13)

But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first. (Hebrews 3:13-14)

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:23-25)

And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you." (Hebrews 12:5)