

Verse of the day - Hebrews 10:24-25

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

O'T Reading - Proverbs 11:25

The generous will prosper; those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed.

New Testament Reading - Philippians 4:4-9 Final Exhortations

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you

Gospel Reading Matthew 14:25-33

25 About three o'clock in the morning Jesus came toward them, walking on the water. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the water, they were terrified. In their fear, they cried out, "It's a ghost!"

27 But Jesus spoke to them at once. "Don't be afraid," he said. "Take courage. I am here!"

28 Then Peter called to him, "Lord, if it's really you, tell me to come to you, walking on the water."

29 "Yes, come," Jesus said.

So Peter went over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. 30 But when he saw the strong wind and the waves, he was terrified and began to sink. "Save me, Lord!" he shouted.

31 Jesus immediately reached out and grabbed him.

"You have so little faith," Jesus said. "Why did you doubt me?"

32 When they climbed back into the boat, the wind stopped. 33 Then the disciples worshiped him.

"You really are the Son of God!" they exclaimed.

SERMON – THE SPIRIT OF GENEROUS ENCOURAGEMENT



- When a very young band called The Beatles were turned down by every record company in the UK and things were looking very grim, did their manager Brian Epstein say ... **"let's be realistic lads... it's time to forget the music and find a day job"** ... or did he say ... **"Be encouraged boys. I believe in you, and one day you will be bigger than Elvis."**



- When St Paul wrote to the fledgling church of Thessalonica, who were suffering the usual heavy trials of persecution and testing... did he say ... **"listen Thessalonians – being a Christian is a tough gig, it's going to crush you eventually, so just go back to the old ways and live a peaceful life."** Or did Paul say ... 11 **"Brothers and sisters, encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing."**



- When Jesus was about to leave the earthly realm and say goodbye to his still rookie disciples who were full of uncertainty, did he say to them ... **"On second thoughts lads, you still have a lot to learn and to be honest, I'm not sure you've got what it takes for the mission I have in mind"** ... or did Jesus say ... **"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and**

make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And remember, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Now that’s what I call encouraging words.

These are 3 Big Crossroad Moments, where people had the choice to speak either words of encouragement - or words of discouragement. The encouraging words, as we know, had a profound impact and the fruits of this encouragement were far reaching. All of which all leads me to believe very strongly in this truth.

The Spirit of Generous Encouragement
is one of the most underestimated
of all Spiritual gifts.
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**The Spirit of generous encouragement
is one of the most underestimated of all Spiritual gifts.**

Words are singularly the most powerful force available to humanity.

Words have energy and power and they have the capacity to help, heal and inspire. Equally, words have the power to hinder, harm and even humiliate. And WE, get to decide how we use this power!

We all know the truth, that there’s many a life that’s been diminished by words of **discouragement**.

We know that children who grow up in a climate of negativity, criticism or indifference, can become like wilted flowers who have never been watered with the life-giving nourishment of encouragement. It stunts their development and growth.

I don’t believe that there’s one area of life, where the *presence* or the *absence* of the spirit of generous encouragement, helps determine the well-being of the environment.

Be it a relationship of any kind – or a school - or a working organisation, or any church community – If the spirit of encouragement ***isn’t being*** cultivated ... then it’s not fully alive. Because encouragement is oxygen for the human spirit.

Every single one of us here will have experienced the power of an encouraging word or action to lift us in our moment of need. Either in small daily doses - or in a way that’s had life changing consequences.

And every single day, we are all in a position, to be either ***the encourager*** or the one in need of ***encouragement***.

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A word of encouragement
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A word of encouragement from a leader
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John Maxwell

Author John Maxwell captures all of this perfectly, with these words

A word of encouragement from a teacher to a child can change a life.

A word of encouragement from a spouse can save a marriage.

A word of encouragement from a leader can inspire a person to reach their full potential.

Encouragement is Godly quality and we should never underestimate its power.

And we see the truth of this on full display’... in both of today’s main passages of scripture.

So, lets unpack them and ask what they reveal to us about how we can keep cultivating the spirit of Generous Encouragement in our hearts and lives?

The first thing we see in both passages. is that they both point to the ***‘one thing’*** that most stifles our capacity to live out our full potential.

The 'one thing' that can steal away all that is life-giving.
And it's the one thing all of us battle with daily, in one form or another.
In verse 6 **Paul names it.**



Do not be anxious about 'anything', says Paul... but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Has anyone here ever tried to not be anxious about 'anything'?

I confess, I've yet to master this.

But what Paul is doing, is pointing us to a deeply profound truth.

Nothing stifles and cripples our human condition like anxiety and fear.

And yet these 2 terrible twins are always with us. They're part of our human condition. And in certain situations, very necessary for our survival. But the real point Paul is making, is we mustn't allow them to dominate us. We mustn't keep feeding the beast.



And this is exactly what we see at play in the Gospel reading, where Peter attempts to conquer his fears and walk towards Jesus on water.

What I've always loved most about this encounter, is the interplay that goes on between Peter and Jesus because it speaks so deeply into the battle played out in our lives, every day.

Stepping out into the risky unknown. Stepping out into the waters of uncertainty.

How many times in life have you had to pluck up the courage to take the first risky step into the unknown? Situations big and small.

I've said before that what I love most about Peter's character, is that he's always the disciple willing to give it a go. And here we see Peter, really wanting to get out the boat and walk towards Jesus, but understandably immobilised by fear.

But Jesus recognises Peter's fear and encourages him. **"Don't be afraid Peter" - "Take courage. I am here!"** Ever noticed, that the sitting right in the middle of the word **encouragement** is the word 'courage'?

Peter does the human thing, just like we do in scary situations. He looks for the encouragement in the uncertainty. **28 "Lord, if it's really you, tell me to come to you, walking on the water."**

And Jesus says to Peter... **29 "Yes, Peter come,"**

But as we know, Peter loses his nerve doesn't quite make the journey. And we read that

31 Jesus immediately reached out and grabbed him. "You have so little faith," Jesus said. "Why did you doubt me?"

I've sometimes heard preachers talk about Jesus' response to Peter's failure, as almost a telling off, but is it? What I see Jesus doing, is the same thing I do with my children or anyone I care about.

If I see them attempting something risky and scary, firstly, I encourage them on.

And then, if they do lose their nerve and don't quite make it ... just like Jesus to Peter, I reach out to them (whatever the situation) and support them.

I then I try to encourage them, by saying “*you almost did it, you just needed a little more faith*”. “*Don’t let the doubts steal away your belief and courage.*” “*Trust in God – trust in Christ.*”

This is where the Spirit of encouragement plays its beautiful part. It’s why its such a spiritual gift. Encouragement through words and actions has the power to help us overcome our anxieties and fears. Encouragement can build us up and strengthen us for life’s turbulent waters. So that next time we get out the boat ... we can MAKE the walk.



And I’ve seen the power of this in my own life. To this day, I can name a life changing moment, planted by the seed of generous encouragement.

MR GRANT STORY.

Back when I was 15 years old, a new English teacher called Mr Grant came to the school, and he made the beauty and power of words so thrilling, I couldn’t wait to get out of bed and get to school for his lessons.

One day we were exploring poetry and the subject of loneliness, and he said ... “*Your homework tonight is to write a poem on loneliness,*”

I remember going home and struggling to write anything beyond what I knew was mediocre. Then suddenly, I had a flash of creative inspiration. And was both exciting and scary, because it felt a bit ‘out there’. A bit’ risky’. And I thought, what if Mr Grant thinks its rubbish?

Maybe keep in the safety zone even if it’s a touch mediocre. Get a good solid B grade.

But I couldn’t shake the feeling that the *risky creative idea, was a really good one.*

So I got out the boat, crafted the poem and gave it in.

A few days later, I was sitting in the main hall at my desk about to take an exam. I knew I was doomed to do badly because I hadn’t revised properly. Just before we started, Mr Grant came over to me and said “*I just want to tell you Jones, that poem you gave in is excellent. It’s creative and original, you’ve got an A plus.*” And then he walked off.

I still remember the exhilaration of that affirmation. He’d actually sought me out to pass on these words and he said them with such genuine conviction.

And here’s the real enduring legacy!

In all my creative endeavours since, I’ve always tried to remember the importance of having the courage to follow your intuition. To believe in yourself, even when it all seems a ‘bit risky’ and ‘out there’ because the best ideas usually are.

So, wherever you may be Mr Grant. Thank you for your generous encouragement and for planting the seed of courage in me. To always ‘get out of the boat’ and take the first step. Even if it’s a scary one.

Can you think of a moment when someone gave you an encouraging word, that lifted you out of a dark place - or even planted the seed of a life changing moment?

So, let me offer some practical suggestions on things we can be intentional about, in order to cultivate the spirit of encouragement in our lives.

Things you can put into practise this coming week.

The first thing I would offer is this.



1. Focus on whatever is true, noble, excellent, praiseworthy and good.

It's very telling that after urging the church of Philippi to not be anxious about anything and to take any fears they have to God ... Paul then gives them these beautiful and wise words of encouragement.

8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

9 Whatever encouragement you've seen or heard from me - put it into practice.

There's a tendency in all of us, to pick out the one thing that went wrong, rather than all things that go right. **And we do it to ourselves, which discourages us. But we also do it to others, which can discourage them.** This is usually driven by our anxieties, insecurities and fears.

I've noticed that those who have the gift of encouragement, focus on these beautiful qualities that inspire and ignite our hearts. I've been on the receiving end of many a timely email, text or spoken word from people that's come just at my lowest ebb. People see that you're aspiring to do the right thing and they take the time to whisper gentle words of encouragement.

So, if we see these qualities in others, we should tell them, acknowledge them, encourage them.

Are you struggling at this moment, because of a disappointment or perceived failure?

Try to focus on what it is you're getting right. Take it God in prayer and petition.

Let God remind you of what you're doing well. And if fear and anxiety are holding you back.

Pray for the encouragement to give you the courage to make the first step

2. Don't forget to encourage the ones you love and live with.

I'm privileged to have confidential conversations with people about their relationships, and it's been quite sobering down the years to hear so many people talk of how they feel starved of an encouraging word from their own spouses and partners. I've often heard both partners in the same relationship say the same thing. I think for many of us, routine and familiarity dull us to the importance of nurturing the ones we love. **Encourage the ones you spend most of your life with.**

- **Encourage your peers.**

I've noticed over the years that leaders in organisations will freely give encouragement to those considered lower in the pecking order but find it much more difficult to be generous in their encouragement of their peers. As one of my peers openly confessed to me... "I want to see my colleagues do well. But not too well." And we can all have this feeling in our hearts.

- **Be intentional about cultivating encouraging spaces for YOURSELF**

Put yourself in a space and place where you can receive encouragement through being in a stimulating inspiring environment. Nourish yourself with whatever is true, pure, noble, excellent and inspiring. All of us have moments when we feel like we need to come up for breath. Last week Gareth and I were both beginning to gulp for air.

So Gareth took a few days of personal development at a Missiology conference and I took off down South for a long weekend. Kim, Myah and I went to Central Otago for a Writer's Retreat that I booked up some months back. It actually came at just the right time.

It was incredible to see the difference in myself come Monday. I felt like a different human being. **So, how can you be intentional about putting yourself in a space to receive inspiration, stimulation and encouragement?**

- **Finally, Pray for others.**

Any of us who have walked a difficult time of struggle, recognise just how encouraging it is to know that people are praying for you. It's immensely encouraging, comforting and strengthening to have the spirit at work in our hearts and lives from the gift of other people's prayers.

I'll finish with these words from Hebrews and a final thought.

"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another."
 Realize that we cannot go it alone. We need to walk life with others. We need to meet together.

"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another"

This is why a church community is so unique. And lived well, so precious.

This is why we really want to cultivate a community here at St George's, where the spirit of generosity is the very heartbeat of who we are.

Because we need to walk this life with others. We can't do it alone, it's too hard.

We need each other to inspire each other and encourage one another.

To stir us up to love and good works. But to do this, we do have to meet together.

I've spent the past week, re-reading all the Epistles of Paul again, and do you know what really strikes home?

Just what a tremendous encourager, St Paul really is.

Yes, Paul was always ready to challenge people when they needed to be challenged. But always the emphasis from Paul was to encourage unity. To focus on Christ. And to build each other up for the challenges they face.

Every single letter that Paul writes and sends, begins and ends with strong encouragement.

I challenge you. Read them all this week and check it out.

And in one way or another they all express the same key core thoughts, that are the very foundation of our encouragement.

- Stand firm in the Good news of Jesus Christ.
- Live every aspect of your life, confident in the Supremacy of Christ and the Supremacy of love.
- Trust and be open always, to the power of the Holy Spirit and the promises of God.
- Live a life steeped in the ways of thankfulness, gratitude, grace and peace.
- Be strong, be courageous and stay utterly centred in a life of prayer.

So, loving generous God, let this be our ethos and our heartbeat, here at St George's. Amen