

One Another

Lesson 10: Encourage and Build Up One Another -- 1 Thessalonians 5:9-15

Picture a young congregation, only a few months old, gathered in a borrowed home in the bustling port city of Thessalonica. They are new in the faith, surrounded by neighbors who do not understand them and some who openly oppose them. Paul had to leave them quickly, slipping out of the city under cover of night because of the danger. Now he writes back to them, anxious as a father, longing to know they are still standing. And near the close of his letter, he hands them not a complex theology but a simple, sturdy tool for survival: keep encouraging one another, keep building one another up.

It is easy to imagine that what holds a church together is the dramatic and the impressive: powerful preaching, large crowds, bold programs. But Paul knows better. He knows that a congregation survives the long haul the way a stone wall stands for centuries, one ordinary stone laid faithfully upon another. "Encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." Notice that last phrase. He is not scolding them for failing. He is fanning a flame they have already lit, telling them to keep doing the small, unglamorous work that quietly holds the whole thing together.

The word translated "encourage" carries the sense of coming alongside someone to strengthen them, the way you might put your shoulder under the arm of a friend whose legs are giving out. And "build up" is the language of construction, of adding course after course until a house stands. Both pictures are patient and physical and ordinary. This is not flattery and it is not empty cheerfulness. It is the deliberate work of putting courage into a brother who is running out of it, and laying one more stone in the life of a sister so that she stands a little taller than she did before.

Before all of this, Paul reminds them why they can afford to spend themselves on one another: "God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him." There it is, the engine underneath the whole passage. We are not destined for wrath. We belong to a Savior who died for us so that we might live with him forever. People who know that, who are sure of where they are headed, have something to give away. This lesson is about giving it away, one encouraging word, one steadying hand, one stone at a time.

Group Discussion: Think of a time when someone in the church came alongside you and put courage back into you when you were running low. What did they actually do or say, and why did it matter so much? What does that tell us about the kind of encouragement Paul has in mind here?

Personal Reflection: Be honest with yourself: are you more naturally a builder or a critic in the life of your congregation? Who is one person God has placed near you who needs you to come alongside and strengthen them this week?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:9–15

Study Questions

1. Paul grounds the whole exhortation in verses 9 and 10: “God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that ... we may live together with him.” How does being sure of our salvation in Christ become the very thing that frees us to spend ourselves encouraging others?
2. Paul says, “Encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” When was the last time you deliberately set out to build someone up in the faith? Be specific about who and how.
3. The verbs “encourage” and “build up” picture coming alongside the weak and laying stone upon stone. What do these images teach us about how God intends a congregation to be strengthened, and why does this differ from how the world thinks growth happens?
4. Think about your words over this past week inside the church family. Did they mostly add courage and build people up, or did they more often chip away at others? Name one concrete moment of each.
5. In verses 12 and 13 Paul tells them to respect and esteem those “who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you.” What does this teach us about

how God shepherds his people and how we are to relate to the elders he sets over a congregation?

6. Is there someone who labors over you in the Lord, an elder, a teacher, a faithful older Christian, whom you have taken for granted or quietly resented? What would it look like to esteem them highly in love this week?
7. Verse 14 gives different responses for different needs: “warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.” What does this careful sorting teach us about real, discerning love within the body of Christ?
8. Which of those four categories describes you most right now, the idle, the disheartened, the weak, or the one called to be patient with everyone? What does Paul’s instruction press you to do about it?
9. Paul commands, “Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.” Why does the refusal to repay evil for evil belong right here, alongside encouraging and building one another up, and how does it reflect the Lord Jesus himself?
10. Look back across 1 Thessalonians 5:9–15 as a whole: salvation secured in Christ, mutual encouragement, esteem for those who labor over us, discerning care for the struggling, and

the refusal to repay evil. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through this passage, and what you will do about it this week.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Hebrews 3:12–14, where we are told to encourage one another daily so that none of us is hardened by sin's deceitfulness; Romans 14:19, where we are to pursue what makes for peace and mutual edification; Ephesians 4:29, where our words are to be used only for building others up according to their needs; 1 Thessalonians 5:11, where Paul again joins encouraging and building up as the ordinary work of the body; Galatians 6:9–10, where we are not to grow weary in doing good, especially to the household of faith.