



Wisdom & Maturity – Part 7

Rightly Depending on Our Comrades

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I would like you to pull out your copy or pull up your copy of God's word and turn to Acts Chapter 20. Withhold your applause, but we've made it to Acts 20. Um, it only took us almost 100 sermons to get here, but we're here. Just be glad I'm not Martyn Lloyd-Jones. We'd still be in Chapter 2. Church history joke for the few of you that got that one.

We're here to a passage, as you can see with the first phrase, "After the uproar had ceased," and Paul and his preaching had caused an uproar. And the amazing thing about this passage is just looking at it, it's filled with names, it's filled with geographical references and cities and places and regions. But just to watch the Apostle Paul after he had caused with his preaching a riot in Ephesus, engaging in immediately encouraging other Christians and then pulling Christians beside himself as he travels, seven of them by name here. And we know there are more because Luke starts saying "us" again in this passage. So he's got an entourage of people that he's drawing to himself, and he himself is going to the disciples. He's pulling them in and he's encouraging them.

And so we see the body of Christ doing what it is supposed to do. This is a communal thing. This is a group thing. This is a body the Bible says. This is a building or a temple, the Church is, where we are put together in the same place at the same time to engage in interpersonal relationships in this thing called the Church. And you don't need a building for that but we got one, thankfully, and we pulled together in these relationships. I mean, that's the observation. This is all an indicative narrative text. We're looking at what happened and it can be confusing with all the details. But you look at all that happened and you think, okay, well, that's cool. Paul is serving as a great example for us, but I want us with just glancing at that passage that you've just done, we're going to get back to it. We'll dig into this, two verses at a time, six verses. We'll take them two at a time and we'll build an outline that I trust will encourage you and push you and exhort you.

But let's first go to Hebrews Chapter 10. You've glanced at our passage, go to Hebrews Chapter 10, and let me remind you of a verse that you probably hear quoted often, and I just want you to glance at this passage in verse 25 of Hebrews 10. It says that, "We shouldn't be neglecting our assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, all the more," I want you to look at this last phrase now, "as you see the Day drawing near." The day has got a capital "D" on it, right? Because it's trying to indicate we're not talking about some day potluck at the church or something. So this is like The Day, the big day, the day that everything in the Bible says all of human history is moving toward the terminus of this epic or this era when Christ will come back. He's going to go away, prepare a place for us and return. He's going to come back to us. He's going to come and he's going to collect his Church. That day is coming.

And what's curious about this passage as it's encouraging the very thing we see on display in Paul's life after the uproar in Ephesus is that he says "You ought to be doing it more, all the



more, as you see the Day drawing near." And I guess my question in the classroom, if I'm there hearing this for the first time, is like, well, how are we supposed to know the Day is drawing near? Particularly if you reference last week's message where I just happened to, as an aside, mentioned to you again that you shouldn't waste your time on YouTube videos that are trying to tell you when the return of Christ is coming because he said you're not going to know and you're not going to know when he's coming back. That's the whole point.

We had that in the passage we were looking at regarding the time of the exile, that 70-year period in the Old Testament when Babylon came and destroyed Jerusalem and there was a 70-year calendar and you were going to know when it was time to go back. Well, we don't know when our kingdom is going to be set up here on earth, when Christ is going to return and pick up his Church. We don't know that. So I said don't worry about knowing when it's going to happen. And yet here's a passage that says, "Well as you see the Day drawing near."

So whatever we find on display in Paul's life regarding the body life, the connection, the relationships, the encouragement, or as I've titled the sermon "Rightly Depending on His Comrades." Right? People are depending on him and he's depending on others. We ought to be concerned about that. This passage and its message should go to the top. It should be an urgent and important message "all the more as we see the Day drawing near." How are we supposed to know that? Well, I think if you're a Sunday school grad, you can think through stuff you know in the Bible. So OK, we don't know when he's coming back, but the general temperature, so to speak, of the culture was talked about a lot. And a line I threw out a few weeks back as we were looking at our passage there in Acts 19 about Ephesus, was that we know this, that it's going to be "as it was in the days of Noah." Right? Things are going to go poorly. Things are going to get worse.

Now, you've got this passage in mind, and I'm going to reference this a couple of times. We might as well take a quick look at verse 24, at least glance at it before we say goodbye to this passage and we'll be back to it. But let's go on. I know I'm way down an alley here. We're going to duck into this store, but we'll come back to the main street in a minute. I want you to go with me to Second Peter Chapter 3. Second Peter Chapter 3. Second Peter Chapter 3. Is anyone still with me on this sermon? I know you're the quiet service, but I mean I'm not expecting you to be loud. I just want to know you're with me here on this. Verse 1 Second Timothy 3. There you go. Second Timothy 3, is that what I said? Did I say Peter? Peter's out. Timothy's in. So we're going to Timothy. See, I know how to get the 9:00 crowd to get interactive. All I have to do is make a mistake. (audience laughs) The 9:00 is on it. It's like, "What? That's not right. That's not right." That's a backhanded compliment right there.

All right. Second Timothy Chapter 3. Second Timothy Chapter 3. If I'm supposed to be doing the thing that, we're three levels deep, but if I'm supposed to be doing the thing that we're about to study in Acts 20 and I ought to be concerned about it because I think they clearly will fit, as we'll see, the principle of that very familiar passage in Hebrews Chapter 10 verses 24 and 25 are certainly on display in terms of Paul doing making the effort to connect, to lean on his comrades, to have his comrades lean on him. They have this connection to not forsake



getting together. If we're supposed to be doing that "all the more as we see the Day drawing near," I'm supposed to know how do I know the day is drawing near? Where are the signs that I'm passing that say, "Hey, the end is near." And how do I know that?

Well, here's how you know it just in a general sense, though, I don't know the day or the hour, I don't know the time. I don't have a year on the calendar. I can't figure this out in terms of a chronology. But I do know the temperature looks like this. Verse 1, "But understand this, in the last days there will come times of difficulty." Now, all the things that are listed in verse 2, all the way through verse 5, they've been around for a long time. As a matter of fact, he gives an example from 1445 B.C. in verse 8 about the opposition of Jannes and Jambres against Moses. So we know the reality of these things have been going on for a long time. But there's something about the last days, there's something about the end "as you see the Day drawing near," that passage makes no sense unless somehow in the Bible I'm having some indicators about how it's going to get worse at the end. How do I know that "the Day's drawing near?" Not just because I'm older, but because there are some things happening.

Well, what are the times of difficulties? "For people will become," here's the first thing on the list. All these things have been true from Genesis 3. I get it. But it's going to intensify to a place where you've never seen it before. "People will be lovers of self." Okay, I could go through the rest of this, but I just want us to start with that. "Lovers of self." I mean, if you just want to step back and say, when have we had a period of time, certainly with the technology that's going to allow the world to kind of get on the same page, though I know every culture, every nation, is not on the same page, but the modernization of technology and allowing people to interconnect around the world where the push has been toward you as an individual person. It's about you.

Everything down to all we're hearing in the headlines and people making speeches and waving flags and doing all the things. It's about self-expression. It's about the self. It's about me being authentic. It's about me. Right? As Trueman's book says, the Triumph of the Modern Self. And just that good analytical scholastic look at the move toward everyone about me, "me, myself, and I" and I being authentically the kind of person that I am. I'm true to myself. I mean, you can read a line in Shakespeare and go, "Well, that's always been around." But no, really, the self-individualized, personalized "me, myself and I" culture. I don't think we've ever seen anything like it.

As a matter of fact, I often put some secular reference academic books on the back of your worksheet and I didn't have room for them this time. We've seen them a million times about habits of the heart and others that talk about the breakdown of the societal, communal culture to where now it's all about individuals. And it's all, as the sociologists say, you can see it kind of breeding in the shadow of this banner of freedom. We want freedom as a people. We want freedom to spread around the world. The freedom often breeds in the dark corners of that concept of this individualized kind of lifestyle. This idea of me being me, and, as I like to say, it atomizes culture where people are all in their little corners doing the thing. "Well, we've had social media for 20 years, right?" Yeah.



You know what social media has done for us. It has isolated people even more. Look at every survey. Look at every stat, look at everything all the way down to the people in the corners by themselves doing nothing but engaging in social media for 7 to 8 hours a day and continuing to isolate. Because here's what I'll tell you. And there's a book coming out about this later. You can see social media fueling envy. Wink, wink. New book coming out on that. Envy. And the envy breeds resentment and the resentment isolates and tears people apart. We have the most individualized, atomized culture, self-focused culture, more than we've ever had.

Now, when the Bible, which is ultimately written by God, when God's Spirit drives the author of Hebrews to say, "Oh, do not neglect the assembly of yourselves together." And now I'm thinking about what you glanced at in verse 24 that I'm supposed to consider how to stir one another up to love and good deeds. So the thing that I'm saying I want as a Christian can't be individualized with a screen in the corner of my house just looking at that screen going, it's about me. It's like, no, I need other Christians to help me accomplish the Christian life, which is to love God and people and do the good stuff, good deeds. I need to stir one other up, I need to think about how to do that and I "should not neglect assembling together as is the habit of some. But I should be encouraging one another and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

Why? Because pulling together and seeing myself as part of a community, an organization, a body, a temple, to see me as a brick in, not an individualized brick over here, but I'm part of a structure. I'm intertwined. Like the body analogy, every ligament, every joint, it's all being held together because I'm part of a communal relationship if you want to go that far in this thing called the Christian life. That we are brothers, one of the most popular words used in the Scripture regarding our relationships.

So we are supposed to be this well-knit together thing and every outpost of the Church around the world and throughout time, these little pockets of people who are so interdependent, relying on each other, interdependent, that ought to be how we ought to go about our Christian life. And that should be a focus we ought to be considering, which is a strong word "Kataphroneó," to think down upon, to have a conscious, deliberate thinking of how do I do this? All the more. "All the more, as you see the Day drawing near."

Why? Because the culture is never going to help us with this, ever. And as we get near the end, the top of the list, "lovers of self." It's about self, not lovers of my community, lovers of my tribe, lovers of my nation, lovers of my... It's not that. It's about self. And so I'm trying to set up this sermon just to in some way get you to pay attention with interest and lean in as an active listener in this sermon to say what we really need is to make sure that this is understood and that we double down on this because nothing in the trajectory of our culture and our world is going to applaud this.

They may show up for some rally or some riot or whatever, but really they're advancing their individual interest, just like we saw in Ephesus, right? Alexander and the Guild of Coppersmiths who were out there saying, you know, silversmiths is... Really they may only join together in their common individual interests. And all I'm saying is we have a common



interest that's really a common interest, that really is encapsulated by the word in the text that's used twice in verse 1 and verse 2, the word "encouragement."

So finally, let's get back to Acts Chapter 20 and let's read verses 1 through 6. And we're going to identify right here in the first two versus a key word repeated twice. So we need to understand because it's not what you may think, the word encouragement. We see it there in Hebrews Chapter 10 verse 25, "encouraging one another and all the more." Same word. Let's figure that out. But let's start by reading the text. And it's a lot of names and stuff, and there's a map there for you which, you know, I have to get it zoomed in enough to have it make sense because now we're east of Turkey, right? We're west of Italy. We're there on Greece, on the left and Turkey on the right, which in ancient terms is Macedonian and Achaia also called Greece in that day. And then to the right on your map is Asia Minor, that's how we called it the first century. All right.

So "after the uproar ceased." Have you found Ephesus, because that's where the uproar was on the map? "After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples," right? The fellow band of followers of Christ. "And after encouraging them," he said goodbye, "he said farewell and he departed for Macedonia."

Now, he did it in a roundabout way. He didn't just go and get on a ship there at Ephesus and just sail across the Aegean to get to Greece. He took a roundabout way. He went up and around. Now we don't know whether he traveled by land or by sea to get to Troas, but we know he's going to get to Troas as part of it, as he describes it later in Second Corinthians Chapter 2. But the idea of this big loop over the top for modern-day Istanbul, this picture is the traveling that he does here and he's going to do what in these regions? Verse 2, "After he had gone through these regions and had given them much encouragement," there's our word again, and then "he came to Greece."

So he could have just gone a straight shot, right? He might have sailed in first class, put his feet up, had his headphones on, iPad out, watching a video, just getting over there to do his business. No, he took the long way so that he could encourage. Now, have we seen that pattern in the book of Acts so far? All the time. It's strengthening and encouraging the disciples. Let's go back to where we've been. Let's strengthen and encourage the disciples. We see that everywhere. Paul's doing this, the long way around. "Now, after he spent three months," there in Greece and we learned this from First and Second Corinthians, we know that he's in Corinth, called Greece, but you could call this a Achaia. It's southern Greece as we think of it today. But the region there, it's labeled on your map as Achaia.

You see that they're not too far from Athens. He spent three months there "when there was a plot that was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria." We've already seen his plans. It's to get back to Jerusalem. But Syria is where he's going to go first, because that's where Antioch is, Antioch of Syria. That's the home church. That's where he's been sent out on all three of these missionary journeys. So he's going to go back there and then go to Jerusalem because he wanted to get there by the Passover. That was the plan.

But the plot messed things up because if he got on the ship from Corinth they would know and he was going to lose his life. Not to mention because he was carrying a large sum of money, which we learn about in Second Corinthians because he was collecting money to go take to Jerusalem because of the persecution and all that was going on there in terms of the lack of material provision in Jerusalem.

So instead of that, "he decided to go through Macedonia." Well, he's just been there. Well, he goes up and over and across again. And as he goes, he goes to Thessalonica and Berea, you can see that on your map. And as he does, he picks up people. "Sopater," verse 4, "the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians." Well, he picked up some there "Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians." You know the Asians, right? "Tychicus and Trophimus." He picked them up from where he was heading back and "these went ahead," verse 5, "and were waiting for us at Troas." So he makes a big arc up over and gets to Corinth, down to Corinth, and then he comes back over and does it again. That's why you see on the map the lines going back and forth.

And when he finally catches up with them, "we sailed away from Philippi," look where that is on the map, "after the days of the Unleavened Bread," which is code for Passover, that's what it's also called, the Passover. So he doesn't make it to Jerusalem for Passover, but he spends his time in Philippi engaging in the Passover. "And in five days we came to them at Troas," so he catches up and "he stayed seven days." Now we'll pick it up next time in verse 7 with an interesting story about a guy named Eutychus but right now we have this little brief chronology of what happens and this name-dropping of all the people who have joined Paul and accompanied him on his trip and they're from all over the place. Berea, Thessalonica, Derbe and from Asia Minor.

So I just want to note a couple of things. Not just the list of people that certainly makes a case for the fact that he's leaning on his comrades. But verses 1 and 2, we see the repeated interest of Paul to encourage people. So I want to think about this as part of the fulfillment of the urgent requirement that as we near the end, you ought to be doubling down on this priority. Number one, because it starts just to kind of grab the imperative from Hebrews Chapter 10 verse 24, we ought to consider, we ought to think down on it. We ought to strategize about it. I'm going to use the word deliberately, which is printed on your worksheet there, but fill in the next two words. You need to "Deliberately Encourage Christians." And encourage we're going to write it down, but then we need to explain it. Because what does it mean to encourage, encourage someone?

Let's understand the word. We often talk about the word, and I can't help but use some of these Greek words that are compounds that are made up of a preposition, the preposition at the beginning of this word. And you've heard it before, because you may have heard a sermon about the Holy Spirit called the "Paráklētos." "Pará" is a Greek New Testament of course, the Greek preposition "down" or "next to." I'm sorry, not down. "Kata" is "down." Pará is "next to," "alongside of." And then "Kaleo," "klētos" is the noun form, kaleo is the verb "Parakaleo" is then to "call in." Kaleo, it's to call, call in alongside of. Now, Paul, if you just enlist that word in this mechanical definition "called in alongside," what does that mean?



Well, it means something and if you've been around my preaching you've heard me often illustrate it with the leg brace. Right? You blow your leg out. You're in a leg brace. You need to put that leg in place because the ligaments are weak. And we got to put that thing in there to support you. That's a good picture of *parákaleo*, called in to support, called in and here's the combination of words in both the Old and New Testament, "to strengthen and encourage." We're going to do something to give strength. Now, I can't walk on it without a brace, but the brace on, blew my knee out, now I can put some weight on it because it helps support the structure. Super important.

So the word encouragement, whatever it means, and certainly the usage of the word is to have stuff put in next to someone that is going to help to hold them up. They're going to feel like they're supported, they're going to feel like they're strengthened. And sure enough, wherever we see the word, both the Hebrew word and the Greek word in the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament, it's often given to people who need strength because they are in a situation that is a challenge. It's hard, hard to do the right thing, hard to keep doing the right thing. It's hard to go to the next level, to go through the next thing. I'm struggling to think about really doing this because it's scary or it's hard. So what you need is encouragement.

Now that's different than just back-slapping someone and saying, "Hey, have a great day in the Lord." Well, I just encouraged them. Well, that's not really encouragement. It may have been a nice platitude, but it's not encouragement. Encouragement has to have a sense of what it's doing. What is the point? Paul is going to encourage them. And we see in other passages, though, it's just a simple reference here, where Paul has a specific reason that they need encouragement. Even to think about, as he said elsewhere in Acts, hey, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." If I'm going through struggles, I may be thinking that I'm on the wrong road. No, let me encourage you. You're on the right road. Hang in there. It's got a purpose to it.

And here's the thing about encouragement. Just jot this reference down. Ezekiel Chapter 13. Ezekiel Chapter 13 verse 22. Ezekiel 13:22. Just one example, you can look it up later, but the idea of us, we can encourage people in the wrong direction or we can encourage people in the right direction. You can encourage someone to do the wrong thing. And so encouragement in itself is not biblical. What we want, here's a good word and I use this purposefully, we want orthodox encouragement. Orthodox.

If I use the word orthodox today and we think about where do we use that word today in a modern context? We talk about going to an orthopedic surgeon. Orthopedics. When I busted my arm, my skinny little arms, I broke both the ulna and the radius. So I broke both bones in my arm. And when that happened, I looked down and saw that things were not right because I snapped them clean. And so, you know, my hand was looking different than it's ever looked because it was kind of dangling on the... I'm sorry, I don't want to get into detail, but kind of dangling off the end of my arm. I'd move my arm around my hand with flop around because I had no bones that were working. I had some, you know, vessels and veins and all the rest,



and skin. But it was like, wow, this isn't going to work for the rest of my life. I need to go to an orthopedic guy and I need to get a cast on this. Right?

Well, there's the parákaleo, call in the cast and let's get this thing casted up. Now, at that point, you could have brought out any interesting shaped cast you want. Because now is the time any direction you want it to go in. Right? You could have had a little figure "S" and you know, you could have done all kinds of things. Make it flop off this way or let's have it grow back that way. No, what I need is an orthopedic guy who's been to medical school who knows this is the way it's supposed to go.

Now, I could have told him that I just think they should be straight. Let's go straight. That's what orthodox means, right? To have it go straight. I want this to go the way it should go. So let's call in a cast or a leg brace. Let's just say you blow out your knee, which I've done as well. My right knee was completely dislocated. I look down, my leg's going in the wrong direction. It's weird. I know. And I got a desk job. Think about my life. But I needed it to be straightened out. And let's put it in something that straightens it out. The orthodox. That orthodox means that it's going to be right. It's going to comport with what is right and what is true.

When the Bible says we ought to "encourage one another and all the more, as you see the Day drawing near," the verse in front of it is we ought to think about how to "stir one another up to love and good deeds," the biblical definition of love, loving the right people, loving them in the right way. Good deeds, they're good deeds. There's an adjective. It's good. I want to make sure they do the good thing. So if I say to someone, "Go have a great day," I have no idea what your day's about. I have no idea what you're facing. "Praise the Lord. Have a good... May the Lord encourage you today." That's not encouragement. Encouragement is I know what the purpose is. I know what should be done here. And I'm trying to tell you to do the right thing. And so encouragement is you having the form that you know is the biblical form.

Let me give you an example of this. Go to Acts 15, that's the Jerusalem Council. Go to the very end of this. They deliver this in writing. Now, the writing of this ends up being Scripture because it's here in Scripture. And so this is God's truth. And they're delivering this letter in Acts Chapter 15. Drop down to verse 31, "And when they read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement." Now think about that.

It's called in alongside God gives direction. It's like this: "a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." The Scripture itself gives me a path to run on. Are you following all this this morning? It sounds complicated to me up here. I hope it's clear down there. But here's a path. The Scripture gives you the guardrails. Here's the guardrail. Now, they knew what to do after the Jerusalem Council because they were wondering about Jews and Gentiles, should we make them get circumcised, eat kosher meals? And so here comes Scripture, right? God's word is laid down. And so I have the track and it gives me a path. And that's encouraging. It's good to know where the boundaries are. It's good to be encouraged that we're doing the right thing.



"And Judas and Silas," verse 32, "who themselves were prophets," they were preaching, they were standing up and speaking, encouraged and strengthened. There's the combination we see everywhere, "encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words." They didn't just keep reading it. Let me read it again. Read it again, read it again. If you go to the bookstore, pick out a card and it's got a verse on it and you pick out that card and you say I want to encourage someone today and you just take that card? "Oh, it's got a Bible verse on it. I'll just put my initials in the bottom and send it."

Now would it encourage? Yeah, it would encourage. Just like the reading of any Scripture is going to bring encouragement. It gives you something that this is the right thing to do and that's great. But I like what comes next here. "Judas and Silas" go out and they "encourage and strengthen the brothers with many words." Right? I'm bringing my words to this, many words.

If you're going to send me, and this is you too, unless you have nothing to read. When someone sends you a card, they got it at the bookstore here, whatever. It's got some Scripture on it, it's got some nice statement on it, don't you? I don't know, maybe I'm revealing too much. You immediately go down to the part they've written by hand. Am I right? Is this just me? Have I offended all of you, who say, "I picked up that card. I worked so hard to make sure the words were printed right in a..." I want to see what you said. Okay? Well, I've read the Bible, so if it's a Bible verse I know, I know what's in there. But I want to get to what you said, and then I might look back and say, "Well, what does the printed card say?"

There's something about you bringing many words to a card that's trying to encourage, particularly if it's trying to keep me going or keep me on the right track or bring me back to the right track or get me moving forward with strength or whatever it might be to somehow get me going in the direction I should go. The many words are so helpful.

So if you're going to deliberately encourage Christians you need to look around and first of all and say who needs that strengthening? Okay? And then it'd be great for you to say what Bible verses would help to guide and direct. Where's the cast, the orthodoxy of saying, here's orthodox encouragement, and then what many words. Like they didn't just put a steel cast on my arm, they put a lot of cotton inside of it. This was years ago, so I don't know what they do now, but I'm assuming they put something that's soft and a lot of cotton. It's like those are the words you're bringing within the parameters of Scripture. And I'm saying I'm bringing words here that encourage you. That's often the medium by which the encouragement gets done.

Moses was told in Deuteronomy Chapter 1 to encourage Joshua because God had said, you're not going to the Promised Land, but your guy here, your understudy, Joshua, is going to go and lead this ragtag team into the Promised Land, and they're going to root out these horrible people in their big cities with big fortified walls. He's going to go take them. So here's what you need to do, Moses. Deuteronomy Chapter 1, "Go and encourage Joshua." And he did. He did. And we don't hear all that he said to Joshua. Some of what he said. But by the time you get to Joshua Chapter 1, God picks up the narrative and you see all the words that he says over and over. Don't be afraid. Be courageous. Be strong and courageous. All of



these reminders about you are called to this. You can do it and we're cheering you on. God is saying this from heaven. He's giving us an example of encouragement. A path is when we don't encourage anyone to do something unbiblical. Always biblical. And then you're many words that shore that up and push them forward.

One more passage on this. Go to First John Chapter 3. First John Chapter 3. Now, remember, as you're turning First John 3, you're calling that up, do you remember James Chapter 2 that says, "Faith without works is dead"? Do you remember that? He, James, takes one example and he says, imagine, for instance, it's kind of like this, you say you have faith in God, but you got no works. It's kind of like a guy who comes to you and says, "Hey, you got a need? Sorry to hear about that. Be warmed and be filled." Right? And then you walk away. "I hope it all works out for you." Now some people think that's encouragement. Someone's in a hard time. "Oh, I'm sorry. I hope it all goes well for you." Or one of our greatest minds here in the Christian community, "I'll be praying for you. I hope that goes well." James is saying, what good is that? Well, it's a nice platitude. It's a nice set of words. But there needs to be more.

And I want to add this third layer. There's the Scripture. Those in and of themselves are the parameters. It's encouragement, orthodox encouragement. Then the padding is all your words that make nice and help to cheer that person on to do what's right. Okay? And then there's the third thing, and this is super important. First John Chapter 3. Don't miss this. First John Chapter 3, drop down to verse 16, "By this we know love, that..." Jesus said he loved us, underlined the part that says Jesus said it, so believe it. Is that what it says? No. This is the 9:00 crowd, I realize that. But someone should say, "No, Pastor Mike. That's wrong. You're wrong. That's not what it says." "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us."

Now, he did say it, but he did something. He acted. In this case he went through great personal sacrifice in suffering to absorb the penalty of our sins. And we ought to say that we love our brothers. No. "We ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." Now an example that's much like James in James 2. "If anyone has the world's goods," now this is going to mean you have something that can help, "and you see your brother in need and yet closes his heart against them, how can God's love abide in him?" Because God's love is always active. It always says I'm here to help, not just with words, but action. And he sums it all up, verse 18, "Little children," hey Christians, "let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."

Now I'm going to say this is a proverbial way to describe this, because of course you should love with your words and your talk. Yes. But it's just the platitude if it's not combined with you saying, "and how can I help?" So I want to add this secondly, if you want to biblically encourage you've got to deliberately think about how to "stir one another on to love and good deeds." And the first thing you're going to think is what does the Scripture say? The second thing you're going to think is what can I say? And the third thing you're going to say is, how can I help? How can I help them? That's biblical encouragement, because I know a lot of people say a lot of things to me and when the going gets tough and they're nowhere to be found. You know what that kind of person's like, right? We have to be a church that doubles down "all the more as we see the Day drawing near," as we "stir one another up to love and good deeds."



How is that going to happen? Your words, your presence, your knowledge of the Bible, your ability to give me words that say stand strong, be courageous. Get this done. I'm here, I'm cheering you on and I'm here to help. Do you follow me on that? That's biblical encouragement and we need more of that and we need to think about it more because the culture is going in the opposite direction. It's atomizing, it's moving into granular little individual "me, myself and I" personalized culture. We should be corporate culture, community. We lay down our lives for each other.

All right, back to our passage, verse 3. Not only is Paul out there making the most of this, greatly encouraging, calling the disciples encouraged, he doesn't feel like it. He probably needs a break, sit under a coconut tree or whatever on an island in the Aegean and just say, I just want to relax. But instead he's actively encouraging. OK? "Then," verse 3, "he spends three months" there in Corinth and "there was a plot made as he's about to set sail for Syria, but he decides to return through Macedonia," and he picks up all these people. "Sopater" he picks up in verse 4, "the Thessalonians Aristarchus and Secundus." He picks up "Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy," of course. And then from Asia Minor "Tychicus and Trophimus." So he's got all these dudes on board and he's got his comrades, his partners. And he travels with them.

It is interesting that Paul does not drop in, encourage the team, encourage individuals, encourage the people, and then withdraw and get on a boat by himself and travel by himself. He's calling all these people and by name. Luke now is describing who they are and where they're from, and they're all going to accompany him as he goes.

Here's the part that gets a little uncomfortable because some of you are all about the first part. Roll up your sleeves. "Let me see, how can I encourage? Yeah, that's good. I need to think about that. How can I encourage more?" But you don't do well at being on the receiving end of it. And that's the point. And even so much the point and so countercultural to what I see going on that I've even named the sermon this, the subtitle. We ought to "Rightly Depend on Our Comrades," which means that we need to, number two, be "Unashamedly Accepting Encouragement." We need to be about the fact that it doesn't make me weak. It doesn't make me someone who is not godly if I'm saying, you know what? I need some people encouraging me. And I not only want to let you know that I need that, but I'm willing to even ask for it. "Oh, that sounds so weak."

Okay, we think that's weak. How about Christ? Jot this down. Matthew 26. He goes to the Garden and says, "My soul is greatly troubled, I'm grieved." And he taps Peter, James, John and says, "You, come with me." Right? "Come with me and pray." And he goes into the Garden of Gethsemane, walking as a pack of four. I just want to tell you Jesus is calling for help and saying, "Please help me." He is rightly dependent on his comrades. And yet we see him as the one in the paintings with the glowing face and the halo and all these losers around him. But the bottom line is he's showing us, by way of example, he's dependent on God's Spirit, he's dependent on getting water from a well when he's thirsty and he's dependent on his comrades to hold him up in tough times. Just like Moses wasn't being weak by saying I



need people to hold my hands up here in that weird scene where he's got to hold his hands up and win the battle and people hold his hands up.

A couple of things. If you call for help and you should be doing that, you should be reaching out and saying, I need my Sopater, I need my Aristarchus and Secundus, I could use another Tychicus and Trophimus. We're going to have to be a little more honest about the struggles in our lives. Second Corinthians Chapter 1. Can you turn there real quick? It is so interesting to me that the Apostle Paul, who seems like such a paragon of strength, says this in the middle of this passage about the tough times he's had in Asia, which, by the way, we've been looking at in Acts Chapter 19. But look at this statement here in Second Corinthians Chapter 1. I mean, just drop into the middle of it. We'll get to the rest of the context. But in the middle of verse 8, "We do not want you to be unaware, brothers," comrades, you're on my team. I don't want you to be unaware. And it would be easier for my reputation if you were unaware. I would feel like a stronger Christian if you were unaware, I would think that people would see me as a paragon of strength if you were unaware. "But I don't want you to be unaware of the affliction we experienced in Asia."

Okay, so you're persecuted. But you're a hero. You're the team captain, right? No, "We were so utterly burdened beyond our strength." It wasn't like, hey, I want to tell you about the struggle I'm having at work, but, man, I'm standing strong for Christ. No, I'm struggling "beyond our strength. We despaired of life itself." I just want you to imagine all the capital that he's just now letting just leak right out of his life by telling them we just didn't want to live anymore.

I mean, the risk that he takes in saying I'm hurting, I was hurting so bad, I didn't even want to go on. He's telling that to who? What's the title of the book? Who is he telling this to? The Corinthians. Well, that's the most godly church in the New Testament, so that makes sense, right? Are there any Sunday school grads here? No, this church is messed up. And yet both Second Corinthians 1, First Corinthians 1, they're saints, they're real Christians. And he goes, "You know, I didn't want you to not know how bad it was. That's why I let you know how bad it was."

And he said it in First Corinthians 15, we "fought" wild "beasts in Ephesus." You should have heard about the riots. And I know you've heard the stories. Titus has been there and I know you know about it, but what a mess. Now, Second Corinthians 1, and "we despaired of life." "Beyond our strength." "Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely on God and not ourselves."

So he's still a leader here, but he's saying I really was struggling and suffering. "He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we've set our hope." Of course, he's still optimistically Christian. He's leading people by showing where his trust is, but he knows he needs help. Verse 11. "You also must help us by prayer." Right? They couldn't be there, they couldn't bring things. And yet he's even willing to ask for support when he needs it "so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many."



You need to be unashamedly unembarrassed, not embarrassed, you need to be bold to be asking to say I could use some encouragement here this week. I could use some encouragement. And that just means a little bit more honesty. And if you sit there today and you say, "Well, I don't want that and I feel like I'm fine. And the older I get in Christ, like the more stable I am, I don't need any help in this. I'm the leader." I just want you to remember that to reject the means of comfort and help and encouragement and strengthening in your life is really a rejection of Christ. It's a rejection of God because God is the God to start this passage, look back up at verse 3, he's the God of mercy and the God of comfort. "Blessed be the God and Father of Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with we ourselves are comforted by God."

How did that happen? "We share abundantly in Christ's suffering," which, by the way, is the reason you need it, because you're going to have more suffering as a Christian than you would have had if you were just a non-Christian in this life. "So through Christ we share abundantly in comfort, too. For if we're afflicted," it works this way laterally. "If we're afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same kind of sufferings that we have. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our suffering, you will also share in our comfort." And he says, down there at the bottom, the passage where we just left it in verse 11, I'm being helped by you and I'm here to help you. All of this leaning on each other, this interdependence.

And all I want to say is when everyone leaves this weekend going, "Ah, Campus Bible Church, I'm a mature Christian. I'm going to encourage people." But no one is interested in receiving encouragement, no one is truly receiving and accepting and welcoming the help, this just doesn't work. We need to unashamedly accept encouragement and even be bold enough to call for it.

One more passage on this real quick. Second Timothy Chapter 4. So again, this seems like weakness. Second Timothy 4 verse 9. It's just one example in this passage, but it seems like weakness, does it not? "Do your best to come to me soon?" Why? Demas is gone. He flamed out. Deserted me. Right? "Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me now." I've got Luke, but I need you. Right? "Get Mark and bring him with you, for he's very useful to me in ministry." I mean, here is Paul going I need you. I got Luke. Timothy, please come. And can you bring Mark? And then I need stuff. Verse 13, "When you come, bring the cloak I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments." Please bring Scriptures and bring my books and bring a cloak and bring people. I need you.

I mean, this is I think for most people it's unexpected that the Apostle Paul would need this kind of stuff. Matter of fact, he's given them time frames. Drop down to verse 21, the end of the book. "Do your best to come to me." I said come to me soon, but can you get here "before winter?" And I need that cloak. Right? So help me out here. Some of you are afraid to tell someone you need a meal in your small group. Some of you are afraid to tell someone you're



going into the hospital because you don't want to trouble anybody. Stop it. Stop. That's the whole point of the Christian life. I would not want to deprive you of the opportunity of comforting me by not letting you know what my needs are. Do you follow what I'm saying here? It's not right. Deliberately encourage Christians, but unashamedly accept encouragement.

Back to our text here, verse 5. Acts Chapter 20 verses 5 and 6. "These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas, but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread," the feast of Passover, "and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days." Okay. It just seems like thanks for your calendar, but at least it allows us to know that there are things in Paul's life in this case that temporarily separate him from his comrades. And we see in his letters that there are some things that separate him from his comrades not for days, but for months, sometimes for years. And as we saw him almost with desperation in Second Timothy 4, he saying, I need you here. He says to the Thessalonians, I long to see your face. I want to be there. I'm bereft. That's the verb, right? At least some English translations translate that way. I was cleft from you. I was torn away from you. I want to be back face-to-face with you.

That is going to happen. And sometimes it happens and like we're going to see later in Chapter 20, sometimes he knows I'm never going to see you again. And they weep on each other's shoulders, saying, we're going to be bereft for the rest of this life. And that's hard. But here's the thing. Do you see this adverb at the beginning of number three on your worksheet? We need to be courageous in the face of that kind of separation. Number three, "Courageously Expect Disruptions," disruptions.

And the reason I chose that word is I thought about that sailing from Philippi to Troas. Do you know how long that should take? Well, we know from Chapter 16 you can go from Troas to Philippi in two days. It took him five days. So that meant they had trouble on the way. They must have had headwinds. They must have had, I mean, it was hard. We're going to see a lot of the boat rides that Paul takes that he's going to have trouble in. But the point is, there are delays that you don't expect and there are things that separate you from the people who are your encouragement and who you're given to encourage.

And I just want to think about it in the second category of the sermon, and that is these men were an encouragement to Paul who were serving a practical purpose in so many ways that the background of this text would inform you on. But the point is, they're an encouragement to Paul. They're a help to Paul, they're a practical help, they're a spiritual help, they're an emotional help to Paul. And Paul has some of these people just torn out of his life sometimes for reasons that are just purposeful and it's a decision that he makes. Sometimes it's not. Sometimes he even says there are people in my life as he tells the Philippians, that I don't want to leave me and they're sick and they might die. And if they were to die, it'd be grief upon grief.

Here's the thing. Everything about the people that you have in your life right now who bring you encouragement and you might be sitting here like spiritually fat and happy, like I'm being



encouraged. It's good. Everything's good. I got the best small group in the world. Guess what? At some point, something's going to disrupt all of that. And it always happens. I guarantee you, mark my words. I am not a prophet but here it comes - your sources of encouragement are going to change. It's just going to happen. Live long enough and it's going to change. I mean, think about it. I deal with and traffic in this all the time as a pastor with death every single week. I'm dealing with people dying or about to die or just died or grief counseling or whatever. It happens. People who have massive sources of encouragement and here's one thing that's certain - death, either that or the rapture. It's going to change everything. And these sources of encouragement, you just need to say I can courageously face the disruption, and that is I know God is going to supply another source of encouragement because that's what he does.

By the way, I've already given you the seeds for this when I quoted Deuteronomy 1 and Joshua 1. You know the Bible books, right? Deuteronomy, Joshua. Deuteronomy, God says to Moses, "Would you please encourage Joshua? He needs it." Guess what happens at the end of Deuteronomy? Moses dies. Joshua now is there, and Joshua needs encouragement and God steps in and provides it.

Now, supernaturally there in Chapter 1, God says these things to him, but I'm sure he had Caleb and others around him who became sources of encouragement because Moses, the greatest encouragement with all the gray hair, the old guy, he's gone now and you have lots of sources of strengthening encouragement in your life that give you orthodox encouragement, good advice, biblically based, and they're cheering you on, and those will be taken from you at some point. And all I'm saying is don't sweat it. Right? I mean, you can grieve, you can cry on each other's shoulder if you know it's one of those departures. I get it. But God is going to supply. He always does. He says, "I'll never leave you and forsake you and I always have tools by which, as the God of all mercy and the God of all comfort, I have ways to comfort you. I have ways to encourage you."

So the disruptions, the changes, which nothing is more certain than change. Right? That's the only constant. Things are going to change. I just need you to never be despondent about those, even if it is the thing that separates my biggest encourager and cheerleader if it's death. Right? God's going to support you. You just need to keep drawing together. You need to consider how to stir one other up within the context of Christian fellowship how I can "stir one another up to love and good deeds." "Not neglecting the assembling of ourselves together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

I came across my 10th-grade report card from English class this week. That was disturbing. Mrs. LaRue was my teacher. And, you know, when your parents start cleaning out their closets in their garage, they give you all the stuff from your childhood. And a lot of times it's always, you know, printed stuff. So I throw it in the scanner and I scan it and it goes up to Flickr and I forget about it. Well, I pulled this one up this week because I was looking, guy in the church was talking about my high school car. So I went on to find my picture of my high school car, and I found Mrs. LaRue's report card. And it's one of those they send home. The



parents got to sign it. And in 10th-grade English, I got a "D" and I know, my wife just gasped out loud. (audience laughs) I got a "D." It was horrible.

And then it always has the academic grade and then it has the conduct grade. And I got a "U" if you know what that means. Unsatisfactory. See, if I had told my wife this when we were dating, I never would have been able to get married. I got a "D" and a "U." And then, of course, I realized, oh, man, this had to go home and get signed. I just want to see if perhaps I had signed it. No, it was one of my parent's signatures. And it wasn't even my mother, it was my father's signature. It's like, oh, man. Then I looked at the little boxes, the teacher's comments. The teacher's comment said he talks too much. In her nice little script handwriting, "talks too much," but it wasn't, and I quoted it improperly, I want to tell you, it had another word. "He talks FAR too much" is what it said.

Now, when my wife met me when I was a senior in high school, and she will tell you this, I didn't talk in class. I did not talk in class. By the time I was in 12th grade, maybe it was Mrs. LaRue's or my dad's punishment. But I wasn't a talker in class. But apparently I was in Mrs. LaRue's class. Now, had you told Mrs. LaRue, hey that kid you gave the "D" and "U" to, he talks for a living, she would not be surprised. Right? So I know that.

But I know this would surprise her because I thought to myself, I was so impacted by seeing this report card and knowing I'd have to confess it to my wife in a sermon this weekend, I was so taken back, I thought, what were we studying? I mean, I don't know. I don't remember what we studied in 10th grade English. So I went on the Internet. So what is the curriculum for 10th grade English in public schools, blah, blah, blah, blah. And I saw what it was. And one of the main... it was the top objective of the English 10th grade public school, it said this: expository writing. Expository writing.

Now expository, if you know anything about theology or whatever, I do expository preaching. That's what I do. I take a text, I try to exposit and explain it. That's what exposit means, to explain it. But it said expository writing. Now, my teacher may not be surprised that I'm talking for a living, but she would be shocked if she knew there are legitimate publishers who ask me to publish writings, papers, books. (audience laughs) I've published several books by legitimate publishers. She, I mean, I assume she's dead by now, but she would be shocked. I don't know. I don't even remember Mrs. LaRue. Obviously, I was busy talking in her class all semester. But I thought, wow, I got a "D" for my writing in 10th grade.

But whatever she had done and my dad had emphasized it had got me to shut up in class by my 12th-grade year, I can tell you that. And maybe it had something to do with me focusing on writing a little better. But I thought, you know, there's no way I became a preacher who does expository preaching and a published author by Mrs. LaRue's comment. But I know that there were lots of names in between all that who did cheer me on when I thought I'd never speak with a microphone, I could never write a book. I mean, all those people along the way who became the support and encouragement of my life to at least move me forward in the path that God had for me. I'm just saying that's the role you play. And it may be like the corrective and maybe some correction in this, but it needs to be more than a snarky comment



to the parents. It needs to be the development, it's correction, it's affirmation, it's encouragement, it's cheering people on. And I just exhort you as a pastor to be an encourager, to receive encouragement and to never be concerned when that encouragement is disrupted. Paul's doing it. It's on display for us and we should be "doing it all the more as we see the Day drawing near."

Let's pray. God, help us as Christians in a culture that is all about individuals and "me, myself and I" to be about us and together as a group, a body that is a body of believers who are committed to being interdependent, to providing encouragement, even the gentle correction that we need in the encouragement we get. I shouldn't quit, I should keep going. You should not be movable and should be immovable, you should be steadfast, you should abound in the work of the Lord. All the things that need to be said in the context of not just people dropping words on us, but their life standing up and saying, "Now how can I help? What can I do to sacrifice and lay down my life to help you love better, to do more good works?" I just pray we'd have that kind of church. And that's not going to happen by people coming in and passively sitting in a sermon on the weekend. It's going to involve leaning forward, getting involved, being highly committed participants here at Compass. So make that the reality, I pray.

In Jesus name. Amen