

## “Reliable, solid help for the New Year”

### 1 Thessalonians 5:8-11 NASB

“Since we are of *the* day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him. Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing”.

**In the uncertainty of the present pandemic, most of us need strong encouragement.**

**Decades ago, I often went to an old friend for encouragement.**

Over the span of about 30 years, he patiently listened and helped me find hope.

**About the age of ten, I became a nearly incurable, dedicated, Boston Red Sox fan.**

One particular year, Boston took an early lead in the American League Pennant race.



In September, however, the Red Sox kept losing, and the Yankees kept winning.

**I felt double-pronged anxiety.**

**First, my apprehension mounted that the Red Sox might fail to win.**

**Second, I dreaded a Yankees win.**

**I could accept a Red Sox loss.**

But I couldn't bear it if the Yankees won.

**Any team winning would have been preferable to a Yankees victory.**

**The prospects of suffering such a double agony sent me to consult our old friend.**

**He assured me that the Red Sox would win the pennant.<sup>1</sup>**

They did, that year, but still lost the World Series.

**I shared great concerns with that fine man.**

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<sup>1</sup> I've since lost interest in professional sports and even much of it at a college level. Greed, immorality, and special interests long inherent in the entertainment industry, in many big businesses, and politics now seem dominant in most sports at those levels. Self-interest and self-centeredness badly infect numerous religious and charity efforts as well. Believers face increasingly hard choices in these and many areas. Unless we love God in Christ with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind, and love our neighbors as ourselves, we serve trifling gods that in the end, always fail.

**He listened sympathetically and never told anyone else about our conversations.**

**Over the years, we conversed often.**

**He was an ideal encourager.**

After he retired, though, our friend faced some low periods in his life.

**Then he came to me for encouragement.**

For few years, in my office, I listened to him several times.

**At times, we all need a boost of spirit.**

W.B.J. Martin recalled a conversation when a northern England church inducted a new minister:

“Northerners pride themselves on being plain, blunt men. One of the deacons at the service of recognition, said, ‘**If we like you, we'll say naught, but if we don't we shall tell you!**’”<sup>2</sup>

Everyone needs encouragement.

A church deacon in Southern California went through a period of uncertainty.



He questioned God's existence and expressed his doubts to the church leaders. Instead of reassuring him, they told him to quit going to church until he believed firmly.

It seemed to Norma and me that the man needed the full nurturing of the church.

**Not censure.**

**In poetic style, Mary Carolyn Davies skillfully revealed how someone inspired her.**

I love You

Not only for what you are,  
But for what I am  
When I am with you.

I love you,  
Not only for what  
You have made of yourself,  
But for what  
You are making of me.

I love you  
For the part of me  
That you bring out;

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<sup>2</sup> *LITTLE FOXES THAT SPOIL THE VINES* by W.B.J. Martin, p - 115

I love you  
For putting your hand  
Into my heaped-up heart  
And passing over  
All the foolish, weak things  
That you can't help  
Dimly seeing there,  
  
And for drawing out  
Into the light  
All the beautiful belongings  
That no one else had looked  
Quite far enough to find.  
I love you because you  
Are helping me to make  
Of the lumber of my life  
Not a tavern  
But a temple;  
Out of the works  
Of my every day  
Not a reproach  
But a song . . .<sup>3</sup>



**All of us need encouragement.**

**But we don't all effectively cheer others.**

Thus our text reads:

**“Therefore encourage one another  
and build up one another . . .”**

**A serious question relates to the basis for  
the encouragement we give others.**

A few years ago, a local paper reported  
that a certain man owed \$175,000, but  
owned only \$4,000 worth of assets.

**Imagine that being your plight and you  
come to me asking for help.**

I say to you,

**“Have faith. Things will work out.”**

**If I hand or lend you cash to cover your  
debts, maybe things will work out for you.**

If we speak dismissively as incurable  
optimists, though, and do nothing to assist,  
embolden, or guide others, there's much  
less chance that things will work for them.

**Some L.A. friends owned a small business.**

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<sup>3</sup> “Love” - Mary Carolyn Davies

**This pleasant, honest, couple worked hard and reared a nice family.**

**One of their children attained great success in the TV industry.**

One day the husband told me about a special ability he thought his wife possessed.

In LA, as in many large cities, finding good parking spots can be frustrating.

**The husband commented on his wife’s ability to think positively about finding a parking space.**



According to him, this couple always found a space while other people drove endlessly around.

**Someone always vacated a space just as they arrived needing one.**

**The church did business with this couple.**

**As a result, I got to know them fairly well.**

**The wife was gifted, efficient, and friendly.**

I never rode anywhere with them so I can’t attest to her faith-parking-space ability.

If she had such a gift, however, it wasn’t biblical kind of faith.

**The Bible nowhere describes faith that way.**

**Many ball teams start games believing they will win.**

**Confidence helps one win.**

**Yet faith doesn’t always directly lead to success.**

**Faith isn’t simply an optimistic attitude.**

Unless we trust in some permanently dependable power, we’re in for great regret.

**Faith needs a basis.**

**First, faith does not equal optimism.**

**It is not the same as a happy-go-lucky attitude that everything always works out.**

**At times things don’t succeed as so-called people of faith expect.**

Hostile authorities once arrested Peter intending to execute him the next day.

**Though scheduled to die on the morrow, Peter amazingly slept like a baby that night.**

**The Lord sent an angel to rescue Peter and the angel had to awaken the Apostle.**

**Escorted by an angel in the middle of the night, Peter walked out the prison doors.<sup>4</sup>**

Herod also arrested the apostle James, but beheaded him.

**No evidence exists that Peter’s faith exceeded James’s.**

The church people probably wondered why James died and Peter remained alive.

**The *New Testament’s Book of Hebrews* helps us understand a vital fact about faith.**

**We find reality, the permanent, only in God.**

**Recall how our text reads:**

“For 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.

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing” (NIV).

**Paul based his encouragement on facts.**

**He founded it on God’s power and Jesus’ eternal presence.**

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<sup>4</sup> See Acts 12

As Jesus promised the Apostles and us:  
“I am with you always...to the close of the age.”<sup>5</sup>

The oft –quoted **Hebrews 12:1** text:  
“**Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.**” does not adequately convey the substance of our faith.

Someone asked:

“**Would you rather have strong faith in a weak bridge or weak faith in a strong bridge?**”

**Faith is not the substance.**



Jesus said: “**Believe in God; believe also in me.**”  
The substance is God, who alone is permanent and strong.

**Our faith is no more permanent than we are.**  
Earth and its things decay, rust, and wear out.  
**God remains the only permanent reality.**

**We usually assume the opposite, don’t we?**

We want something we can taste, see, feel—that has substance.

**That’s what most folks think.**

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 28:20

**“Don’t try to sell me on something I can’t see, touch, or experience!”**

**Think about what most of us believe and trust.**

If you put your money in CDs thirty years ago, you weren’t doing badly.

**Now CDs they pay almost nothing.**

If you had your money in the stock market one ago, you possibly thought that the good ride would never end.

All human investments prove impermanent and unreliable.

**Nothing about us or what we possess stays as is.**

Not a single thing stays the same.

**The only constant is change.**

**Only God stays the same.**

**Are you still convinced of the permanence of what we see and experience every day?**

Think about how you looked 20 years ago.

**Have you incurred any physical maladies?**

**Gotten any wrinkles?**

**Lost any hair?**

**If you haven’t lost hair, has it changed color?**

**Have you lost any friends or loved ones?  
Nothing we possess here is permanent, is it?  
During the late 60s and 70s I raised a lot of  
money for the Los Angeles Wilshire YMCA.**

They awarded me several trophies for being among the top fund-raisers.

**I treasured them for a while.**

**Now I don’t even know what happened to them.**

If they exist, they’re tarnished or possibly rehabbed into bowling trophies.



**The above truths remind us why Jesus warned us not to store up treasures on earth.**

**What we can see and touch keeps changing.**

**This world is passing away.**

But the unseen does not change.

**“Jesus is the same, yesterday,  
today, and forever.”**

**Trust in him; encourage your friends and loved ones to trust him and his promises.**

**Pattern your life after him to become like him.**

**God's Word and Spirit will embolden you,  
then you can strongly encourage others  
to believe in God, who alone gives life.**

**As Paul confidently declared in Philippians:**

**"Our citizenship is in heaven.  
And we eagerly await a Savior from there,  
the Lord Jesus Christ,  
who, by the power that enables him to bring  
everything under his control,  
will transform our lowly bodies  
so that they will be like his glorious body,"  
(3:20, 21).**

**This truth about resurrection heartens us who  
believe in God and our savior, Jesus Christ.**



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**God bless you in Christ!**

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