

**There's an App for That: 2. Encouragement**  
**Proverbs 11:25; 1 Thessalonians 5:11-22**  
**February 12, 2017**  
**Pastor Tami Luckhardt**

In recent weeks, we've talked about how much like our phones. How much we need our phones. We carry our phones with us wherever we go; to work, to school, shopping, to the doctor's office, on vacation, while we're exercising on the treadmill at the gym or hiking through a national park. Seldom are our phones further than an arm's length away. Even at night while we are asleep, our phones are often charging on our bed side night stands just a few feet away from us. My car even reminds me to take my cell phone with me when exiting the car. But phones are seldom used for making phone calls anymore. I'm not sure why we still even still call them phones when they're mainly used to store our apps.

What's an app? It's the abbreviation for "application software". Mobile apps (apps for our mobile devices) were originally intended for general productivity and information retrieval, including email, calendar, contacts, stock market and weather information, but their use has spread. This can be seen in the explosion in the number and variety of apps. Apps were first introduced in 1983 and in July of 2008, Apple launched its App Store with 552 apps. Today, The Apple Apps Store has over 2.2 million apps available for download!

For almost everything and anything we need, we can truly say, "There's an app for that!" It's true for me. I wake up in the morning to the sound of my clock app. The alarm clock is set to wake me up at just the right time every morning. Then I quickly check the weather app to see what the forecast is for the day so I can decide what shoes to wear. Next, I disarm the home security system with the help of the Xfinity app. And that's all before my feet even hit the floor in the morning!

Once I'm up, I might take a minute to check the Facebook to see if my friends and family have posted any interesting or exciting news overnight. If I'm going for a run, I use a tracking app to record my time and mileage. And since moving to the northwest suburbs just ten months ago, the Google Map app is my favorite app while in the car. Even my coffee shop has an app!

Our lives are full of apps. Apps make our lives easier. One might go as far as to say, apps make our lives better. Apps are helpful, but only if we apply the information that they provide. For example, if the alarm goes off at 6:30 a.m. but I turn it off and go back to sleep, the clock app was not helpful. Oversleeping is not going to make my day better. And if I look at the weather app and it says that the temperature is five degrees and I get up and put on a pair of sandals, my life is not going to improve. Application is everything!

We read last week that James, the brother of Jesus, said this about application: "Don't fool yourself into thinking that you are a listener when you are anything but, letting the Word go in one ear and out the other. Act on what you hear! Those who hear and don't act are like those who glance in the mirror, walk away, and two minutes later have no idea who they are, what they look like." Remember, James was writing to the early Christians, probably around the year 49 CE. These were the first generation of Jewish Christians who were following in the way of Jesus. And he was saying, it's important to know God's word but it's more important to actually DO IT! And as twenty-first century Christ followers, the same applies to us today!

We are in week two of a four-week series talking about what things we, as Christ followers, should apply to our lives. These are the instructions are given to us in the Bible so we know

what it means to live a Christ-like life. They're not meant for other people. It's "the Word of God for the People of God." And today's application is ENCOURAGEMENT. Encouragement is the expression of affirmation through language or other symbolic gestures meant to instill courage, perseverance, confidence, inspiration, or hope when addressing a challenging situation or realizing a potential. Here's an interesting fact about encouragement. Studies show that it takes five words of encouragement to erase just one negative comment and our conversations average six criticisms to every one encouraging word. That means we need 30 words of encouragement per typical conversation to come out on the positive side. So, reversing this trend can be the key to improving our relationships at home, at work, and in our everyday lives.

In 1956, Alfred Adler was considered the first community psychologist because his work pioneered attention to community life and population health. He believed that encouragement was a core feature of human development and that human beings are intrinsically drawn to belonging and contributing to others and society. When people lose social interest they need encouragement, especially in regard to engaging with others. Adler considered the ability to encourage others the single most important attribute in getting along with other people. In other words, in order to get along with other people, we need to be encouragers! Adler believed the goal of encouraging others is to instill courage and confidence so to have a fully functioning person. A fully functioning person is one who:

- Has a positive view of themselves and others
- Is open to new experiences
- Has a sense of belonging
- Has the courage to be imperfect (we'll come back to this in a minute)

The first scripture today is from Old Testament, the book of Proverbs. Solomon, the third king of Israel, and one of the wisest men to ever live, wrote Proverbs. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he gave practical insights and guidelines for life. Knowledge (having the facts) is good but there is a vast difference between knowledge and wisdom. Wisdom means applying those facts to life. We can amass knowledge. but without wisdom, our knowledge is useless. We have to learn how to live out what we know. Solomon gave hundreds of practical examples of how to live according to godly wisdom. Today's proverb is, "The one who blesses others is abundantly blessed; those who help others are helped."

This short, concise message contains a moral truth and speaks to the importance of living generously. This is the exact opposite of what the world tells us we should do. The world tells us to hold on to as much as possible, as much as we can get our hands on or into our bank accounts. But Solomon tells us that God blesses those who freely give of their possessions, energy and time. When we give, God supplies more so we can give more. Over and over again in the Bible, we find very clear, concise instructions that we are to lift one another up, so to encourage one another.

And if there was ever a time in history when Christians needed to lift and affirm each other, it was in the years immediately following Christ's death. 1 Thessalonians 5 says this, " So continue encouraging each other and building each other up, just like you are doing already." Paul wrote this in about the year 51 to the church in Thessalonica, one of the churches that he had established on his second missionary journey. And he wrote it to encourage the young believers. He wanted to assure them of his love and to praise them for their faithfulness during a time of persecution. Persecution meant beatings and torture and for many, and for some it meant an early death by crucifixion or stoning at the hands zealous Jews, angry Greeks or

ruthless Roman authorities, all of whom hated Christ. To be a Christ follower in the first century meant to give up everything, literally everything. Paul wrote to remind them to put off their hope and trust in Jesus. He wrote to encourage them and to inspire them to do the same for one another.

Paul goes on, “Brothers and sisters, we ask you to respect those who are working with you, leading you, and instructing you. Think of them highly with love because of their work.” Those who are working for you, leading you and instructing you. Paul is referring to the leaders of the church. Here at Messiah Church, we have many, many leaders. Some are servant leaders and some are staff. We would not be at all effective in our efforts to change lives and transform the world if it wasn’t for all of the servant leaders, formerly known as volunteers. So to all of you, ALL OF YOU, and there are many, who give of your time to be in service to others, thank you. But I want to take a minute this morning to talk about the staff leaders of Messiah Church.

This past week, ten of your program staff, office staff and pastors spent two days together at a retreat center just north of Cambridge, Minnesota. I am thankful that they all were able and willing to arrange their work and personal schedules so that they could be there. And I’m so thankful to be a part of a church that believes in investing in developing their staff. Thank you for that! During our time together, we had an outside coach come in and train us in methods of effective, healthy communication. We explored the power of owning our vulnerability and discussed the strategies needed for the next twelve months of ministry.

Can I tell you something? These people are the most passionate, committed, talented and encouraging people I have ever had the privilege with which to work. They have dedicated their lives to serving the Lord through their work. Not only do they care deeply for one another, but they care deeply for each one of you. How do I know this? I’ve seen them care for you. I’ve seen them cry with you and celebrate with you. I’ve seen them give you their time, energy and encouragement when their families were waiting for them at home. I’ve seen them reach out to the community of Plymouth and beyond because they genuinely care about reaching new people. I’ve seen them gently nudge you to take leaps of faith and then offer a safety net when they thought you needed one. And I saw how hard they worked this week at allowing themselves to be vulnerable with each other.

Dr. Brene Brown is a research professor at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work, and we watched her TED Talk entitled, *The Power of Vulnerability*. Do you know about Ted Talks? T.E.D. is a nonprofit organization devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful talks. TED began in 1984 as a conference where Technology, Entertainment and Design converged, and today covers almost all topics — from science to business to global issues — in more than 100 languages. Dr. Brown’s research revealed that “in order for authentic human connection to happen, we have to allow ourselves to be seen. We have to allow ourselves to be vulnerable. And those who can allow themselves to be vulnerable have one thing in common. They have a strong sense of love and belonging. And the people who struggle with being vulnerable do not. They don’t believe they’re worthy of love and belonging. That’s it. The one thing that keeps us out of connection is our fear that we’re not worthy of connection.

And so these folks who allowed themselves to be vulnerable had the compassion to be kind to themselves first and then to others, because as it turns out, we can’t practice compassion with other people if we can’t treat ourselves kindly. And they had connection, as a result of authenticity. They were willing to let go of who they thought they should be in order to be who they were. They were able to fully embrace vulnerability. They believed that what made them

vulnerable made them beautiful. They didn't talk about vulnerability being comfortable, nor did they talk about it being excruciating. They just talked about it being necessary. They talked about:

- the willingness to be the first to say, "I love you"
- the willingness to do something where there are no guarantees
- the willingness to breathe through waiting for the doctor to call after your medical test
- the willingness to invest in a relationship that may or may not work out

Vulnerability. We all have it. It is that place where fear and shame live, but when we are able to own our own stuff and confess it to others. It is also that place from where love, joy and belonging are born. On our retreat we realized that without some degree of vulnerability, we will never be able to be in authentic, loving relationships with one another. So, we're working at it. Are we perfect? Absolutely not. Will we still make mistakes? Probably! But as Paul suggests, they deserve your love and respect and I encourage you to reach out to them in the days ahead with some words of affirmation.

About 10 years ago, there was a popular book entitled, *How Full is Your Bucket*, where psychologists Donald Clifton and Tom Rath, the same authors who wrote *Strength Finders*, proposed a metaphor for looking at our positive and negative interactions during the day. They suggested that we imagine we all have a bucket within us that needs to be filled with encouraging words. When we're negative toward others, we use a dipper to remove from their buckets and diminish their positive outlook. When we treat others in encouraging ways, we fill not only their buckets but ours as well. So I ask you, are you a Bucket Dipper or a Bucket Filler?

These are scary, uncertain and divisive times in which we live, and the world tells us that we should be looking at each other with anger, fear and suspicion. It's really easy to jump on the bandwagon and be a Bucket Dipper. But I want to finish up here today by looking at the last part of our scripture to see what the Bible says about how Christian should treat each other.

- **Live in peace with each other. Warn those who are disorderly.** This may be the first century version of "If you see something, say something," but it doesn't mean run to the airport authorities. It means as Christians, we should go directly to one another with our concerns. Maybe you have a situation that has been sitting uneasy on your heart. Maybe it's time for a crucial conversation with someone. Can you take the first step towards making peace?
- **Comfort the discouraged.** Are there people around you who need encouragement? Be intentional and keep your eyes open this week and ask God to show them to you. I bet you'll see them. They are vulnerable and they struggle to believe they're worthy of connection. Will you stop and offer them a word of encouragement and hope? Or maybe you are feeling discouraged. Can you let yourself be seen? There are people looking for you.
- **Help the weak.** Those who are sick, lonely, lost, and left out. Can you find ways to bring them strength?
- **Be patient with everyone.** Be kind and compassionate with each other, forgiving each other, just as Christ has forgiven you.
- **Make sure no one repays a wrong with a wrong, but always pursue the good for each other and everyone else.** What Jesus asks of His followers is not passivity, but surrender of the need for personal revenge. Rather than getting even, we should be willing to go to the opposite extreme, to be humble and pursue good.

- **Rejoice always.** This doesn't mean that we should never feel sadness or grief. In fact, the Bible tells us that godly people are marked both by mourning and also by irrepressible joy. In challenging times, if we cry out to God for help and re-focus our thoughts God, our moods and outlooks can change, even when our circumstances cannot.
- **Pray continually.** There is nothing too small or too big; too insignificant or catastrophic for God. And God is jealous for you. God craves a relationship with you. Find time to be still and spend it in prayer with God.
- **Give thanks in every situation.** You can thank God in every circumstance because guess what? No matter what happens, God isn't going to leave you or stop loving you. And if you look for it there are always things for which to be thankful, even when the circumstance stinks.

Gratitude always builds deeper relationships between you and other people, and between you and God. If there's someone you want to get closer to, start expressing gratitude to that person. Maybe there is someone here today, or someone you will go home to, or someone with whom you've had a falling out and haven't spoken to in a very long time, and it's weighing heavy on your heart. Can you find a way to express gratitude towards that person? Maybe you can write a note of kindness and encouragement to that person. Call or text them just to tell him or her that you're thankful. Maybe start with, "I'm grateful for you because..." As you encourage others, you'll find that God builds into your life as well through your deep relationships with God and others.

Why? "Because this is God's will for us in Christ Jesus."

### **Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of February 12, 2017**

**Weekly Prayer:** Lord God, Maker of heaven and earth, we come into your presence as living sacrifices to offer You our worship and thanksgiving, our praise and our prayers. Come among us, living Lord. Through the power of Your Holy Spirit, transform our hearts and minds so that we may recognize Your presence, hear Your voice, know Your will, and walk in Your way. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

### **Monday, February 13, 2017**

#### **Scripture: Proverbs 11:25**

The one who blesses others is abundantly blessed; those who help others are helped.

**Observation:** Knowledge is good (amassing facts), but knowledge without wisdom (applying those facts to life) is useless. The wisest man who ever lived, Solomon, left us a legacy of wisdom in the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he gives us practical insights and guidelines for life.

**Application:** The world says to hold on to as much as possible, but Solomon tells us that God blesses those who freely give of their possessions, time and energy. When we give, God supplies more so we can give more. In addition, giving helps us gain a right perspective of our possessions. What do we gain by giving? Freedom and joy!

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, I give you myself today. Use me. Let me share my time, my wealth and my energy to make this world a happier, healthier, safer place for someone else. I know that this may mean that I have to step outside of my comfort zone. I'm ready! Boldly use me, without limits, to offer your love to a broken world. Amen.

**Tuesday, February 14, 2017**

**Scripture: Acts 4:36-37**

There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”). He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.

**Observation:** We learn a number of useful things in this short passage. We learn that Barnabas’ given name was Joseph. He was a Jew and a Levite. Levites were assigned different roles during the history of Israel. Some Levites were priests. Some were musicians. Some were teachers, judges, even accountants. Levites were called upon to assist or read Scripture in the synagogue, a practice that is still observed in some synagogues today. We also learn that Barnabas sold a field he owned and gave the proceeds to the apostles to be used to support their work and the needs of the believers in Jerusalem. He clearly was an extravagant giver. Finally, we learn that the apostles gave him the name Barnabas, which Luke tells us means “son of encouragement,” a magnificent name that undoubtedly described his character.

**Application:** Luke has painted a vivid picture for us of the kind of Christian Barnabas was—and the kind of Christian we might each seek to be—one who leads others to faith; the kind of leader who helps churches transform their communities, who shows kindness, who has a deep faith, who is led by and filled with the Holy Spirit. Who is your Barnabas? To whom are you Barnabas?

**Prayer:** Oh Lord, make me like Barnabas, generous, an encourager, a good person. Fill me with your Holy Spirit, and with the gift of faith. Amen.

**Wednesday, February 15, 2017**

**Scripture: Hebrews 10:24-25**

So let’s *do* it—full of belief, confident that we’re presentable inside and out. Let’s keep a firm grip on the promises that keep us going. God always keeps God’s word. Let’s see how inventive we can be in encouraging love and helping out, not avoiding worshipping together as some do but spurring each other on.

**Observation:** Over-scheduled. Over-committed. Overwhelmed. These are excuses often heard for not gathering with other Christ followers in regular worship and faith groups when in fact, these should be the precise reasons that we put Christian fellowship at the top of our “So Let’s Do It” lists. The book of Hebrews was written to the 2nd generation Christians who were at risk of slipping back into their old routines for lack of understanding of Biblical truths. In these divisive, scary and angry times how can we apply what the Bible tell us about what it means to be followers of Christ? God’s promises are timeless, true and steadfast.

**Application:** When we meet and worship together in Christian fellowship, we encourage and help each other. We gather together to share our faith and strengthen each other. Every day, the world presents challenges, distractions and struggles that are too heavy for us to carry alone. Worldly values will do their best to keep us away from gathering but we should use these times to make an even greater effort to be faithful in attendance so to encourage and lift each other up.

**Prayer:** Loving God, we thank you that we stand in a long line of believers who have been faithful through the ages. You have been leading your people through trial and difficulty and have always set before them hope for today and hope for a better tomorrow. We pray that you would bless us in our time as we seek to be as faithful as our ancestors. May we too know a faith that is filled with hope in things not seen. Amen.

**Thursday, February 16, 2017**

**Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:11-18**

So speak encouraging words to one another. Build up hope so you'll all be together in this, no one left out, no one left behind. I know you're already doing this; just keep on doing it. And now, friends, we ask you to honor those leaders who work so hard for you, who have been given the responsibility of urging and guiding you along in your obedience. Overwhelm them with appreciation and love! Get along among yourselves, each of you doing your part. Our counsel is that you warn the freeloaders to get a move on. Gently encourage the stragglers, and reach out for the exhausted, pulling them to their feet. Be patient with each person, attentive to individual needs. And be careful that when you get on each other's nerves you don't snap at each other. Look for the best in each other, and always do your best to bring it out. Be cheerful no matter what; pray all the time; thank God no matter what happens. This is the way God wants you who belong to Christ Jesus to live.

**Observation:** Encouraging one another means more than speaking affirming words. It means overwhelming each other with appreciation and love, noticing the small things, giving thanks in all circumstances and assuming the best of one another.

**Application:** One key to effective living is sensitivity, sensing the need of those around us and offering the appropriate encouragement in response. We can't effectively help until we know the problem. We can't administer the medicine until we know where the wound is. That means spending time together. Is there someone you know who could use an encouraging word today? Have you offered guidance or companionship to someone who seems lonely or lost? Have you offered a word of appreciation to the spiritual mentors and leaders in your life? What is your prayer of thanksgiving today?

**Prayer:** Creator God. Giver of Life. Become alive for us again in these quiet moments. We pray that in this teachable moment you would again open to us your powerful and grace-filled presence. Let us be the hands and feet of Jesus to the world. Amen.

**Friday, February 17, 2017**

**Scripture: Exodus 16:2-4, 35**

And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, 'Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into the wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.' ... Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you...'

The people of Israel ate the manna for forty years, till they came to a habitable land.

**Observation:** The people of Israel must have felt like they were never going to reach the promised land. They spent 40 years (40 years!) wandering around the desert. There were times when they showed they trusted God, but there were also times they let their discouragement get

the best of them and they “gave up” by complaining and disobeying God. Time and time again, God encouraged His people that He would help them. Even though they disobeyed and often did wrong things, God continued to provide for them, like when He sent manna (bread) from heaven.

**Application:** When we’re feeling lost, overwhelmed, discouraged or embarrassed by our choices, God never leaves us. Even when, in the midst of our discouragement, we want to give up on God, God is true and everlasting.

**Prayer:** Dear Grace-giving God, this is hard. Each time that I fall short of who you call me to be, I get discouraged and disappointed in myself. Help me to know you are near. Help me to make better choices. Help me to see you at work in my life so that I can be an encourager to others. May this be so, so that we are drawn into a trusting, life-giving relationship with each other and with you. Amen.

**Saturday, February 18, 2017**

**Scripture: Romans 15:2**

Those of us who are strong and able in the faith need to step in and lend a hand to those who falter, and not just do what is most convenient for us. Strength is for service, not status. Each one of us needs to look after the good of the people around us, asking ourselves, “How can I help?”

**Observation:** If we merely try to please our neighbors we will be people-pleasers. We should be living to win the approval of the Almighty God. So we are called to set aside willfulness and self-pleasing actions for the sake of building others up for the good of God’s kingdom. Therefore, as Christ followers we should ask, “How can I help you?”

**Application:** As you go through your day today, look around you. Is there someone to whom you can offer assistance or encouragement? What might it look like to put aside your desires and plans for today and let God use you to be a blessing to others?

**Prayer:** Gracious God, empower me with the contagious, miraculous, saving message of Jesus. Boldly use me, without limits to reach new people and heal a broken world. Create in me a joyful heart for all that you are doing in and through me to change lives and transform the world. I pray in the precious and powerful name of Jesus. Amen.