

HIGHER AIM WITH DR. CURT DODD

The Ministry Of Encouragement

Becoming A Passionate Disciplex | Part 3 | 1 Thessalonians 3

INTRODUCTION

It doesn't take long to feel welded tightly to people who love Jesus. The apostle Paul spent only about a month with the believers in Thessalonica, yet his heart remained deeply connected to them. This kind of spiritual bond doesn't happen by accident. In a world that can feel isolating, God calls us to be intentionally connected to His people, not just by sitting in the same room but by investing in one another's lives.

This is where the real work of discipleship flourishes. In *1 Thessalonians 3*, Paul gives us a powerful model for what it means to be a passionate encourager. He shows us that one of the most vital ministries we can have is to strengthen and encourage others in their faith, helping them stand firm in the Lord no matter what trials they face. God wants to use you to be that person for someone else.

KEY POINTS

1. Listen With Focused Intentionality

The greatest gift you can give someone is to truly listen. This goes beyond just hearing their words. It means developing spiritual discernment to hear what they are not saying, to sense the void behind a statement like, "I'm doing great." When you are in a conversation, focus on them. Resist the urge to look over their shoulder to "work the room." By giving someone your undivided attention, you communicate that they are intensely important, which is a powerful form of encouragement. If you feel you need more encouragement in your own life, start by giving it away. Give, and it will be given to you.

2. Speak Truth To Cast Vision For Others

Meaningful encouragement is not empty flattery; it is truth spoken in love. As you build relationships, God will give you opportunities to help others believe in themselves by casting a vision for what He can do in their lives. This includes applauding tenacity in the face of opposition. Like George Washington, who met with failure but never gave up, there are people around you who are faithfully "keeping on keeping on" even if they aren't seeing success. Point out that strength. Applaud their perseverance. Paul did this for the Thessalonian church, affirming their faithfulness amid persecution, and it fueled their endurance.

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3. Point Them To The Solid Ground Of Jesus Christ

People will disappoint you. Pastors, churches, and denominations will let you down. As the old hymn says, "On Christ, the solid rock I stand. All other ground is sinking sand." The greatest thing you can ever do to encourage another believer is to point them to Jesus. He is the only one who will never fail. When you encounter someone who is discouraged by the church because it's "full of hypocrites," gently ask them where their faith is placed. Is it in an organization or in Jesus? Our hope must be in Christ and Christ alone. He is the friend who comes in when the whole world goes out.

4. Affirm Your Belief In Them And Never Give Up

There will be people God brings into your life who are at the end of their rope, ready to quit. Don't give up on them, especially when they have given up on themselves. Your words of belief may be the very thing that helps them continue. In 1952, after a disappointing fourth-place finish in the Olympics, Roger Bannister was ready to give up running. But his coach and teammates believed in him. They encouraged him, paced him, and told him he could be the first person to break the four-minute mile. Because they believed in him, he didn't give up, and in 1954, he made history. God has placed you next to someone who needs you to believe in them. Stand in the gap, because God has never given up on you.

The ministry of encouragement is not reserved for pastors or gifted speakers; it is a calling for every single believer. This is where faith becomes tangible within the church community. As Paul demonstrates, our investment in others is a vital part of discipleship. It's in our small groups and one-on-one relationships where we have the greatest opportunity to help others stand firm in the Lord. By listening, speaking truth, pointing to Christ, and refusing to give up on people, we participate in God's work of strengthening His church.

This is long, patient work. It's about building a legacy of faithfulness that outlasts our own lives. The encouragement you offer someone today may be the key to their perseverance tomorrow, shaping a testimony of endurance for the next generation. This is how we build up the body of Christ. Your quiet, steady faithfulness in the life of another person is a powerful witness. Ask God to show you one person this week who needs you to "stand in the gap" for them, and then take a simple, practical step to offer the gift of encouragement.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. The sermon highlighted the difference between hearing and truly listening. In what practical ways can you practice more intentional, focused listening in your relationships this week?
2. Dr. Dodd reminded us that our ultimate hope is in Jesus, the "solid ground." When you are disappointed by people or institutions, what is one step you can take to intentionally shift your focus back to Christ?
3. Think of a time when someone believed in you when you were ready to give up. How can you pay that gift forward and "stand in the gap" for someone in your life who is facing failure or discouragement?
