

HOW TO ENCOURAGE SOMEONE WHO IS BREAKING

Proverbs 12:25, 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Sanni, John

Christian encouragement is not the art of making people feel better; it is the ministry of helping broken people find strength enough to keep walking with Christ.

1. THE REALITY WE MUST NOT IGNORE

There are people sitting beside us every Sunday who are smiling with a heart that is collapsing. Some are grieving, struggling in their marriages, carrying financial pressure, battling loneliness, disappointed with God, burdened by guilt, or simply exhausted from pretending everything is fine.

Not everybody who is breaking makes a sound. Some break loudly; others break quietly. Some cry; others smile. Some ask for help; others become experts at hiding. A person can still work, worship, answer questions and attend church while something inside is pressing downward.

2. OUR TWO TEXTS SPEAK TO THE SAME WOUND

Proverbs 12:25 says anxiety weighs down the heart, while a kind word cheers it. The person may still be walking, working and smiling—but inwardly carrying a weight nobody sees.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 commands: “Encourage one another and build each other up.” Encouragement is therefore not merely a personality trait; it is a Christian responsibility. The church should be a place where wounded people find strength to continue worshipping God.

3. REMEMBER: MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL CAN BREAK TOO

The fact that someone ministers to others does not mean that person never needs ministry.

We must not assume that preachers, ministers, elders, teachers, youth leaders or other workers are always spiritually and emotionally strong. Ministers may carry grief, family pressure, financial concerns, disappointment, loneliness, exhaustion, private struggles and unanswered prayers while continuing to preach, teach, pray and serve.

Sometimes the Church notices the sermon but does not notice the preacher. We may ask, “How was the message?” without asking, “How is the messenger?” A minister can be pouring strength into the congregation while quietly running out of strength himself.

The person standing at the pulpit may also need somebody to ask, "*Brother, how are you really doing?*"

Therefore, encouragement must travel both ways: ministers strengthen the Church, but the Church must also strengthen its ministers. **Galatians 6:2** reminds believers to bear one another's burdens. Nobody should be made to feel that being a minister means being forbidden to be tired, hurt or vulnerable.

4. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ENCOURAGE SOMEONE WHO IS BREAKING?

To encourage a breaking person is to enter their pain carefully, listen honestly, speak God's truth appropriately, provide practical support where possible, and help them regain enough strength to keep walking with Christ.

Encouragement does not always remove the burden; sometimes it gives the person strength to carry it.

5. SEVEN PRACTICAL MOVES: NOTICE → LISTEN → FEEL → SPEAK → HELP → PRAY → FOLLOW UP

NOTICE — Pay attention to changes: unusual silence, withdrawal, irritability, missed church, loss of interest, excessive busyness or a repeated "*I'm fine.*"

LISTEN — Let the person speak before you begin preaching. Do not interrupt, rush or turn their story into your story.

FEEL — Try to understand what the experience feels like from their side.

Validate pain without validating wrong choices.

SPEAK — Give the right word, at the right time, in the right tone. Jonathan helped David "*find strength in God*" (**1 Samuel 23:16**).

HELP — Encouragement can be practical: a visit, meal, phone call, transport, financial assistance or help solving a pressing problem.

PRAY — Do not merely say, "*I'll pray for you.*" When appropriate, pray with the person immediately.

FOLLOW UP — Do not let the person become a Sunday conversation. If you say, "*I'll call tomorrow,*" call tomorrow.

6. HOW NOT TO ENCOURAGE A BREAKING PERSON

- ✓ Do not minimize: "It isn't that serious." You do not know that.
- ✓ Do not compare: "Others are suffering more." Comparison often produces shame rather than healing.
- ✓ Do not preach before listening. A Bible verse can be true and still be badly timed.
- ✓ Do not shame them. Scripture records deeply distressed believers such as Elijah, Job and David.
- ✓ Do not make promises God did not make: avoid "Everything will be fine by next month."
- ✓ Do not gossip. If someone entrusts you with their pain, you have been given a stewardship, not a story to share.
- ✓ Do not try to become their saviour. Support them, pray, listen and walk with them—but

point them to Christ and, where necessary, competent professional help.

7. JESUS IS OUR PERFECT MODEL

Jesus did not treat wounded people cruelly. At Lazarus's tomb, He wept. When Peter failed, He restored him. When the disciples were frightened, He strengthened their faith. In Gethsemane, Jesus Himself experienced profound anguish.

Christianity does not teach, "Strong people never break." It teaches, "Broken people can still be held by God."

Our goal is not merely, "I feel better." The goal is, "I can trust God again." Christian encouragement ultimately leads people back to Christ.

8. SOMETIMES ENCOURAGEMENT LOOKS LIKE FOOD

In **1 Kings 19**, Elijah was exhausted, afraid and isolated. He wanted to die. God did not begin with a sermon. He gave Elijah sleep and food, and then He spoke.

Sometimes a person is too exhausted to process your theology.

Sometimes spiritual care looks like: "*I brought you food.*" "*Let me drive you home.*" "*You do not need to be alone tonight.*" "*I'll sit here with you.*" "*Let's get you some help.*" Spirituality is not always a sermon.

9. WHEN SOMEONE TALKS ABOUT SUICIDE

Never dismiss a statement such as "*I don't want to live anymore*" as attention-seeking. Take it seriously.

Ask calmly and directly: "*Are you thinking about killing yourself?*" If the answer is yes, or there is immediate danger, stay with the person and involve appropriate emergency or professional support immediately.

The church should be spiritually present and medically responsible.

Faith and mental-health care are not enemies. A person may need prayer and counselling, Scripture and professional treatment, the Church and medical care. These supports do not have to compete.

10. BUILD A CHURCH THAT NOTICES

A congregation should not merely be a place where the strong worship with the strong; it should be a place where the strong hold up the weak. This ministry belongs to all of us—not only elders, preachers, counsellors or youth leaders.

Every Christian has a ministry of encouragement.

And that includes our ministers. Check on the people who regularly check on everyone else. Encourage the preacher, the elder, the Bible-class teacher and the worker who keeps showing up. Ask about the person behind the ministry.

11. THREE SENTENCES TO REMEMBER

- ✓ Don't try to fix every broken person; first learn how to sit with them.
- ✓ Don't merely make people feel better; help them find strength in God.

- ✓ Don't just tell people that Christ loves them; become an expression of that love.

CONCLUSION — DON'T LET THEM BREAK ALONE

Every one of us will eventually need encouragement. There will be seasons when prayer feels weak, disappointment is difficult to explain, and the valley seems endless. God has not designed Christianity as a solitary journey; He gave us one another.

When somebody's hands are too weak to hold on to God, we hold their hands until they can hold on again.

So look around. Somebody may be fighting a battle you know nothing about. Somebody may have smiled while fighting tears. Somebody may be a minister who has spent years strengthening others while quietly becoming exhausted himself. Do not be too busy to notice. Do not be too religious to listen. Do not be too quick to judge. Do not give them a verse and disappear. Stay. Listen. Pray. Help. Call again. Walk with them. And when you cannot carry them any further, carry them to Christ. You may not be able to stop the storm in someone's life—but by God's grace, you can help them discover that they do not have to face the storm alone.

ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER • BUILD ONE ANOTHER UP • HELP THEM FIND STRENGTH IN GOD