

The Promise and Mutual Encouragement
Psalm 46
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

George Muller once said: “The beginning of anxiety is the end of faith, and the beginning of true faith is the end of anxiety.”¹ The more faith a person has in Jesus Christ, the less anxiety that person will have. Anxiety comes with uncertainty and concern for what is happening or what may happen. It may be connected with finances, housing concerns, medical issues, or relational problems. Although our nation is in a state of high anxiety and problems abound, this is nothing new. Waves of concern and problems have dampened the lives of many cultures and persons throughout the world and throughout all generations.

In the century that followed the first disciples of Christ, a new wave of anxiety was building up in the followers of Jesus. It was believed early on, that the return of Jesus was imminent. Even Paul at first thought that Jesus would return during his lifetime. But as time passed, it became clear that what might be imminent in God’s time might not be imminent in our time. Consider how you would feel if you knew Jesus was returning in your lifetime? Now how does that feeling change knowing that his return might not happen anytime soon or perhaps for hundreds or thousands of years from now?

Paul reminds the Christians that they are right to understand that his return will happen like a thief in the night and they should be ready for his return. But Paul also reminds them that they should not simply give up on their daily lives. Rather they should live with the assurance that their faith will take them safely into the day of the Lord.

In other words, don’t live in fear that we are not good enough and would not be ready *IF* Jesus came back tomorrow. Instead, trust in the promise of Jesus that our faith is sufficient because of God’s grace. This means moving from anxiety to trust. Through faith, we belong to a new day; one that is filled with promise and salvation. Paul says: “But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.”

Sometime when you're in an airport, observe the difference between passengers who hold confirmed tickets and those who are on standby. The ones with confirmed tickets read newspapers, chat with their friends or sleep. The ones on standby hang around the ticket counter, and pace around in worry. The difference is caused by the confidence factor. If you knew that in fifteen minutes you would have to stand in judgment before the Holy God and learn your eternal destiny, what would your reaction be? Would you stand by worrying and pace? Would you say to yourself, "I don't know what God's going to say--will it be 'Welcome home, child,' or will it be 'Depart from me; I never knew you'?"²

¹ <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/a/anxiety.htm> (accessed November 8, 2011).

² Bill Hybels, *Too Busy Not To Pray*, IVP, p. 113. <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/a/assurance.htm> (accessed November 8, 2011).

Paul is saying that because of Jesus we can, with confidence and assurance, say that we will be welcomed into God's eternal kingdom. We don't have to let worry about salvation interfere with our daily activities. Rather we should trust in the promise of Jesus and rest in God's assurance.

Paul goes on to say that instead of worrying we should confidently work toward mutual encouragement. This means being a source of encouragement and strength for those around us. We have the assurance, so let's use that assurance to build up the lives of others. Paul even notes that the Thessalonian Christians are already doing this, but he encourages them to keep up the good work! Don't slack on the mutual encouragement that has been going on.

William Arthur Ward once said: "Flatter me, and I may not believe you. Criticize me, and I may not like you. Ignore me, and I may not forgive you. Encourage me, and I will not forget you."³ Mutual encouragement is so important in our interactions because it helps build up the other rather than tear a person down. Mutual encouragement can be used to help persons overcome all kinds of problems, including loneliness, discouragement, a feeling of failure or loss, guilt, and numerous other feelings and problems.

Forty thousand fans were on hand in the Oakland stadium when Rickey Henderson tied Lou Brock's career stolen base record. According to *USA Today* Lou, who had left baseball in 1979, had followed Henderson's career and was excited about his success. Realizing that Rickey would set a new record, Brock said, "I'll be there. Do you think I'm going to miss it now? Rickey did in 12 years what took me 19. He's amazing."

The real success stories in life are with people who can rejoice in the successes of others. What Lou Brock did in cheering on Rickey Henderson should be a way of life in the family of God. Few circumstances give us a better opportunity to exhibit God's grace than when someone succeeds and surpasses us in an area of our own strength and reputation.⁴

Or consider this story:

Edward Steichen, who eventually became one of the world's most renowned photographers, almost gave up on the day he shot his first pictures. At 16, young Steichen bought a camera and took 50 photos. Only one turned out -- a portrait of his sister at the piano. Edward's father thought that was a poor showing. But his mother insisted that the photograph of his sister was so beautiful that it more than compensated for 49 failures. Her encouragement convinced the youngster to stick with his new hobby. He stayed with it for the rest of his life, but it had been a close call. What tipped the scales? The vision to spot excellence in the midst of a lot of failure.⁵

³ <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/e/encouragement.htm> (accessed November 10, 2011)

⁴ *Ibid. Our Daily Bread*, June 19, 1994.

⁵ *Ibid. Bits & Pieces*, February 4, 1993, pp. 4-5.

Every day we have the opportunity to encourage someone or to discourage someone. I love the song that says, “Don’t tell the kids not to fish in the puddle because they might just catch something someday.” Let us live each day, trusting in the promise of God’s love and leaning how to speak with the encouragement that builds others up instead of tearing them down. Amen.

Prayer:

Gracious God,
You have given us the gift of words. Help us to use our words in ways that build up your kingdom and encourage one another. Help us to trust in your love and assurance of salvation so that we worry less and encourage more. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.