

# Christ-Centered: The Pursuit of Healthy Relationships

February 5, 2023

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**Stage Reading:** *John 16:32-33* “A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

Good morning, Church! Before we dive in I want to take a few minutes and talk about something really exciting. We've mentioned this but we have two teams headed out on mission trips this summer. We have a team going to Honduras to continue our work with Disciple Makers International and we have a team headed to Kenya to continue our work with Missions of Hope International. Two very different parts of the world and two very big opportunities to share hope. We're super excited about these teams. Those teams are formed, they are meeting and preparing. My family and I have the privilege of being a part of the team going to Kenya and we truly can't wait.

Here is what I want us to think about this morning. When it comes to mission trips there are two types of people that make those trips effective. There are goers. Those are the people who get on planes and travel and go where we are going. They meet the people, they invest in those people, they get their hands dirty, and they do the work of the gospel in those places. But there is another type of person that makes these trips possible and those are senders. Those are people who pray and give to make these trips possible. We obviously need goers but we really need senders. In fact, with any given trip you actually need a lot more senders than you do goers. And so today we wanted to make sure you know that it is really easy to be a sender. All you have to do is go to [Lakeside.org](https://lakeside.org) and click the very obvious banner at the top of the screen. That takes you to a page in which there are two boxes on which you can click, one for each team. Just in case you missed all of that you can find all this information in the focus emails starting this week. Now, remember, a sender does two things. First and foremost, they pray. Every single person in our church can do that. As your pastor, I am asking you to do that. I'd love for every single person in our church to visit those links simply for the sake of praying over each team. Secondly, senders give and we need some of you to do that. It is very simple and very clear as to how you can give

to those teams when you visit those links. Keep in mind, when we do stuff like this we are asking you to consider giving above and beyond what you normally give to the ministry of Lakeside Christian Church. Sometimes folks decide to shift their normal offering, which makes our church happen, to a mission trip. Don't do that. That is robbing Peter to pay Paul. Pay Peter and Paul! In all seriousness, this is how the church is called to function. Some go, some send, and we all move the kingdom forward. That is what we are setting out to do and we want all of you to be a part of this.

One more thing. We always get asked what happens if we give too much and a trip is overfunded. The whole team gets upgraded to first class! No. Here is what happens and when this does happen it's actually one of my favorite parts of any trip. When we find ourselves over-funded then the leader of the trip gets to have a very exciting conversation with our mission partners on the ground. I've had this conversation before. I have gotten to sit across from a partner and said look, our church is crazy generous and we raised more money than we needed to get here and accomplish what we set out to accomplish so now I get to ask you... what else can we do? How can our church bless you? Really cool stuff comes out of that and my prayer is that we get to have those conversations this summer in Kenya and in Honduras and then we get to tell you those stories. So there you go. Head to those links, TODAY, and become a part of what God is empowering us to do across the world.

As for today, we are finishing up our Christ-Centered series, this is a series all about pursuing healthy relationships. Why are we talking about this? Because God said it is not good for us to be alone and when we embrace that we actually discover that we are better together. Healthy relationships with other people make life better. In fact, we need each other. We were not created to do this life alone we were created to thrive in community with one another. Last week we talked about how the practice of accountability helps foster healthy relationships and this week we are talking about the concept of encouragement.

**Encouragement: the action of giving someone support, confidence, or hope.**

Biblically, encouragement is imperative to our collective journey forward. Remember, one of the reasons that relationships and not being alone are so important is because that is exactly what evil wants for you. Evil wants you to

be alone. When you are alone you are weak and vulnerable to attack. Encouragement plays a vital role in ensuring that you are not alone. The author of Hebrews said it this way:

**Hebrews 3:12-13 See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.**

A sinful, unbelieving heart would be a heart that has become disconnected from Christ and His church... that heart is therefore... alone! The author is saying do not allow yourself to drift into isolation. Then he says to help each other out by doing what? Encouraging one another daily. When you do that what happens? Your hearts are protected from sin’s deceit... they won’t drift toward isolation. This means that this practice of encouragement carries the ability to tether us together. It holds us both close to Christ and close to one another. So the billion-dollar question becomes if encouragement can do this powerful and very necessary thing, then what is it? What does it look like? Practically **How do we encourage one another?**

Well, let’s start by saying this. **Encouragement is not flattery.** Encouragement is not just saying nice things to each other. A lot of encouragement is contained within nice things that are said but that is not what encouragement actually is. The book of Proverbs had some stuff to say about this:

**Proverbs 26:28 A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and a flattering mouth works ruin.**

**Proverbs 29:5 Those who flatter their neighbors are spreading nets for their feet.**

Bottom line: encouragement is not flattery. It’s not just saying nice things that make people feel warm and fuzzy inside. So what is it? Well, when all else fails and you are having a hard time figuring out what something should look like there is a simple rule you can live by. They used to put it on bracelets in the 90s. **What would Jesus do?** Just do what Jesus does and you can rest assured you are right on target. So our goal, for the rest of our time together is to understand how Christ went about encouraging those around them. And one of the clearest examples we have of this is in the book of John. Very close, in fact, mere hours, before Christ was betrayed by Judas. After having a

meal with His disciples and instituting what we would come to know as communion and then washing His disciple's feet in one of the greatest displays of humility imaginable, Christ and His disciples moved outside and into a garden. Here John records a long discourse in which Christ covers a multitude of topics. All of it is very much focused on getting the disciples prepared for what is about to happen but also what will happen after that. We have the luxury of turning a few pages ahead, seeing the resurrection, and then the birth of the church. This conversation will be one that Christ desires the disciples to continually look back on as they are experiencing all that stuff that will soon come. Here's a quick rundown of the stuff Christ covers: **(Build)**

### **He comforts the disciples.**

He promises that God is in control and that God has a plan and that they are really going to enjoy this plan but it requires Christ to no longer physically be with them.

### **He affirms that He is the way to the Father.**

He is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Him.

### **He promises the Holy Spirit.**

Christ promises the Spirit as an advocate. The Advocate will continue the work of refinement in our hearts that Christ started and lead us into a deeper and deeper understanding of Christ and connection with Christ.

### **He offers the vine & branches illustration.**

Christ is the vine. You are the branches. The branches cannot live without the vine because the vine is the source of life. Apart from Christ, we can do nothing. This is crucial to remember because...

### **He promises persecution.**

Christ literally tells the disciples that the world will hate them. And then chapter 16 gets really interesting. Christ is preparing the disciples for the reality that they will encounter persecution and it may feel especially daunting because He will no longer physically be there. This certainly freaks the disciples out. Then Christ begins to explain the reality that He will be with

them it will just be different. And that's good because not only will they have the presence of Christ but they'll also have the power of the Holy Spirit. But the disciples don't get it.

**John 16:16-18 Jesus went on to say, "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me." At this, some of his disciples said to one another, "What does he mean by saying, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,' and 'Because I am going to the Father'?" They kept asking, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We don't understand what he is saying."**

So rather than get into the vast complexities of what it will be like to interact with Christ when He's seated on His throne in heaven and we are still on earth Christ just tries to help these guys wrap their heads around the fact that they are about to see Him rise from the dead. You won't see me... cause I'll be dead... and then you will see me... because then I'll be alive again. But even this is completely outside the disciple's realm of understanding. Christ can see that:

**John 16:19-24 Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, "Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me'? Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.**

To put it simply: for a moment things will seem like they have gotten way worse but then they will be way better. But, even though things are way better it may be a bit unsettling because it will be very different. That's also a good thing. In those days, after everything that is about to happen, you will step into a new reality in which you won't have to ask for anything. You'll have everything you need from the Father, through me. Now, this is a moment when a really dangerous mentality can sweep in and take you in a very

destructive direction. This is one of the key passages that fuels something called the prosperity gospel. The belief is that at the end of the day what God wants most for you is your happiness and you to have lots of stuff. Spoiler alert, that is not God's priority for you and that is not what Christ is saying here. He's not talking about stuff and certainly not financial gain. We said this last week, context always matters. We have to keep what Christ is saying here in line with what He has been saying. Two prevailing concepts that He has been discussing to this point. The disciple's ongoing knowledge of Him and His presence with them. Those are the things that we will have access to in abundance on the other side of Christ. Knowledge of our savior and His presence in our lives. The Holy Spirit will actively be working to deliver both and God will shower them on us in abundance without us even needing to ask but Christ has now given us a direct connection to the Father that sin had previously severed. What you can rest assured of, disciples is that on the other side of this, you will have me in abundance and I will give you the Spirit and I will connect you to the Father. That is why we echo the prayer: give me more of Jesus because that is where life is. Christ doubles down and makes this crystal clear:

**John 16:25-28 “Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father. In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.”**

Pretty soon, because of what is about to happen, you will move into a new reality in which I do not have to talk to the Father for you. You will talk to the Father through me. Christ is bridging the chasm that sin created between us and God. And then something very pivotal happens that we cannot miss:

**John 16:29-30 Then Jesus' disciples said, “Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech. Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God.”**

Well Jesus, why didn't you just say so!?!?!? This is one of those maddening leadership moments where you've been saying the same thing for a very long time and suddenly the people you have been saying it to just get it... but you

are really glad they do. And talk about in the nick of time. The disciples, mere moments before the cross, finally see clearly. This guy doesn't just talk about God better than anyone we have ever heard. He is God. This guy is Lord. And it's when they finally understood that... that Christ extended one of the most powerful encouragements this world would ever know:

**John 16:32-33 A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.**

I know what you're probably thinking: this sure ain't flattery! My goodness, this encouragement has all kinds of bad news! I mean it gets pretty good at the end but, my word, the way it starts!?! These words that came out of our savior's mouth reveal some very important truths when it comes to true encouragement.

### **Encouragement tells the truth.**

When you encourage someone you are offering them the unfiltered truth. Look at how Christ did this:

**John 16:32-33 A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.**

Listen, guys, some really hard stuff is about to happen. It is immediately going to shake you. You are going to run and you will quickly be exactly where evil wants you. Alone. Sometimes, the most encouraging thing we can do for someone is to acknowledge their reality and acknowledge that their reality is hard.

There is a guy in our church that possesses the gift of encouragement to an extraordinary degree. He writes notes. Like all the time. I get them on a regular basis. I recognize the handwriting and I look forward to opening them every single time. They always follow the same pattern but they never get old. Every single one of these notes acknowledges that what we are up against is hard. He doesn't apologize for that. He doesn't offer some secret quick fix. He

just acknowledges it. Do you know what that does for me every single time? It reminds me that I am not alone. Even if it seems like I am. Someone else sees this. Someone else acknowledges that this is hard and I am reminded that I do not have to do this alone. That is exactly what Christ is doing. But then what does He do? He pulls their attention away from their own turmoil and draws it to His example.

### **Encouragement points us to Christ.**

**John 16:32-33 A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.**

You guys are going to freak out. You're going to run. And when you get your wits about you there is going to be a presence of guilt that you all abandoned me and left me alone. I'm not alone. Through all this stuff that I am about to endure, I will continue to cling to the Father. And I am telling you all of this so that you will know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you are never alone. Because you can cling to me. Because I am here.

I have come to believe that one of the most powerful forms of encouragement has nothing to do with words but everything to do with presence. I have people ask me all the time: what do I say to someone who is hurting? Here's the answer I have come to give, and I didn't read it in a book but learned it from first-hand experience of people doing it for me, I have no idea what you should say but perhaps it's nothing at all. Just be there. Be there. When they turn around, be there. They may be on the other side of the country but you can send a text or make a call that reminds them that you are simply here.

There is another guy in our church, who lives on my street and walks a lot. Every time he walks past my house he texts me. Nothing profound. Never complicated. Almost always it's simply, "You good?". Guess what I believe about him without the slightest doubt? He's there and that means I am not alone. He is there and he is ready whenever I need him to point me to Jesus Christ. Last thing is this:

### **Encouragement cements our hope.**

**John 16:32-33 A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.**

When we encourage one another, when we acknowledge the difficulty of one another's journeys, when we commit our presence to one another, we are then empowered to cling to hope together. And that hope is simple but it is profound. Jesus wins. This world can throw all the trouble it wants at us but Jesus Christ has already won. He's bigger. He's greater. He is untouchable by sin and death. And He's got us.

And so the commitment of encouragement is simply this: **We will not let each other forget who Christ is and what Christ has done.** When evil tries to lead one of us astray. When evil tries to make you forget. When evil tries to get you alone and isolated. The rest of us are committed to reminding you of what is true, of who Christ is, and that He is our hope. And that hope is enough.