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Exhort One Another Every Day

Hebrews 3:1-19

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Happy Mother's Day to all the mothers who are with us in person and online. There are many roles that mothers play in the lives of their children, but one of the most important is the role of **encourager**. A mother's encouragement shapes a child in powerful ways. Encouragement builds confidence, resilience, emotional stability, and perseverance. Children who are consistently encouraged learn how to face difficulty without giving up. They learn how to process disappointment, how to keep trying, and how to endure hardship. Encouragement adds courage.

And the truth is, encouragement never stops being important. Children need it. Teenagers need it. Adults need it. Christians need it. That's exactly what we find in *Hebrews 3*. The writer of Hebrews is addressing believers who are tired, pressured, and spiritually vulnerable. Some are drifting. Some are discouraged. Some are in danger of slowly turning away from Christ.

We all need, and thrive on, encouragement – and in *Hebrews 3*, we're told **to encourage or exhort one another every day**. Listen to *Hebrews 3:7-14*.

“Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, ‘Today, if you hear his voice, **do not harden your hearts** as in the rebellion, as on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your ancestors put me to the test, though they had seen my works for forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, and I said, “**They always go astray in their hearts**, and they have not known my ways.” As in my anger I swore, “They will not enter **my rest.**” **Take care, brothers and sisters, that none of you may have an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.** For we have become **partners of Christ**, if **only we hold our first confidence firm to the end.**”

These verses give us three clear calls: **Guard your heart, Encourage one another, Hold firmly as partners of Christ.**

1. Guard Your Heart

Verse 12 says: “**Take care, brothers and sisters, that none of you may have an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.**”

Notice that this warning is written to Christ followers. This isn't addressed to outsiders. This is written to people inside the church. The danger described here is not usually sudden collapse. It often drifts slowly. Last Sunday, Pastor David Pranga talked about drift and used the image of a boat untied from a dock. The boat didn't explode. It didn't sink immediately. It simply drifts slowly away with the wind and current. That's the kind of danger Hebrews is warning us about.

People rarely wake up one morning and decide to abandon their faith completely. Instead, drift happens gradually. Prayer becomes less consistent. Conviction becomes weaker. Compromise becomes easier. Sin becomes easier to justify. Worship becomes optional. The voice of God becomes easier to ignore.

The preacher of Hebrews says: "Take care." Pay attention to your heart. Because unbelief is not always loud rebellion. Sometimes unbelief looks very ordinary. It looks like slowly trusting God less and less.

Verse 13 explains why this happens – because sin is deceitful. **Sin Deceives and Hardens.** Verse 13 says: ***“so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”*** Sin lies. It tells us: “This won't hurt you.” “It's not a big deal.” “You can stop anytime.” “You deserve this.” “This will satisfy you.” “Nobody will know.” Working at Funtown USA, an amusement park in Maine, when I was fifteen and sixteen years old, people would come up to me and say, “Let me do it for free. No one will know.” And I'd reply, “You'll know, I'll know, and God will know, and that's three people right there so, no. I'm not going to let you do that.” I got some funny looks from people when I said that.

Sin rarely appears dangerous in the moment. Often, it appears reasonable – or we tell ourselves it is because we want to do it. That's why it's deceitful. And as time passes, deception produces hardness. A heart that once responded quickly to God slowly becomes dull and resistant. A person who once listened carefully to God slowly stops listening. That process almost never happens overnight. It happens gradually. It's what happened to the Israelites during their forty years in the wilderness, which is described in the Book of Exodus and in *Psalms 95*, which Hebrews quotes extensively. God and Jesus both forcefully condemn hardness of heart in the Bible. It's bad for us, physically and spiritually.

One of the greatest dangers in the Christian life is isolation, which is also bad for us physically and spiritually. We need to pray for members of our church who have physical challenges that isolate them from others because that is such a difficult position to be in. When nobody really knows us, drift becomes easier. When nobody asks us hard questions, compromise grows quietly. When nobody encourages us spiritually, discouragement settles in. When we don't encourage others, we become too self-focused for our own good.

And that's why verse 13 gives us one of the clearest commands for Christian community in the entire New Testament. *“Exhort one another every day.”*

2. Encourage One Another Daily

The word “exhort” means more than simply being kind. It means encouraging, urging, strengthening, warning, comforting, challenging, and calling one another forward. This is important because sometimes we can see something in or for someone else before they see it themselves, or they may see something in or for us. The Christian life was never meant to be lived alone. Notice how practical this command is. Not: “Encourage one another occasionally.” Not: “Encourage one another when convenient.” But: “Encourage one another **every day.**”

That requires intentionality. That requires presence. It requires relationships where people know one another. It requires moving beyond surface-level Christianity. Not just: “How are you?” “Fine.” But: “How is your soul?” “What are you struggling with?” “How can I pray for you?” “Where are you discouraged?” “Where are you tempted to drift?” Hebrews says that daily encouragement matters because our hearts are vulnerable, and sin is deceptive.

This makes me think about the sport of crew. Some of you have rowed before or have watched rowing competitions. An eight-man or eight-woman racing shell in action is an incredible thing to watch because every person in the boat must work together in complete unity and perfect synchronization. There are nine people involved. There are eight powerful rowers, who have trained to have great endurance. And there is the coxswain. The coxswain is the smallest person in the boat, but the most important voice. The coxswain acts as the eyes and coach of the crew, aiming to keep them in sync, energized, and aware of competitors, to ensure a smooth, powerful, and successful race.

To exhort the crew, the coxswain says things like, “Find that swing,” “Quick hands away,” “Breathe,” “Only 500 left; empty the tank,” and “Stay focused!”

A drifting boat simply follows the current. But a racing shell moves intentionally and powerfully because everyone is pulling together and someone keeps calling them forward. That is a picture of the church. The Christian life is not passive drifting. It’s believers helping one another to keep rowing toward Christ. And you don’t have to be the strongest person in the church to encourage someone else. The coxswain is the smallest person in the boat.

Sometimes, the most important ministry is simply helping another Christ follower to keep going. In the terrific book, “The Boys in the Boat”, Daniel James Brown tells the story of the University of Washington rowing team during the Great Depression hoping to represent the United States in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, Germany. One of the themes throughout the book is **the power of encouragement and unity**.

The University of Washington’s biggest rival was Cal, which was coached by Ky Ebright, a remarkable coach who is in rowing’s Hall of Fame. Ebright cared deeply for the young men in his charge. “The night California won Olympic gold in Amsterdam in 1928, an emotional Ebright approached his coxswain Don Blessing, put his arm around the young man and said with a cracking voice, ‘You know, Don, I cussed you a lot of times and made you mad a lot of times, but you’ve been the greatest coxswain, the greatest student, I’ve ever had, and I want you to know how much I appreciate that.’ ‘It made me cry,’ Blessing later said, ‘I mean he was God to me’” (page 86, “The Boys in the Boat”). That kind of encouragement changes people.

Later in the book (pages 239-240), when Joe Rantz is restored to the number one Washington boat, his teammates all welcome him back and encourage him, and the entire spirit of the crew changes. Why? Because encouragement and unity matter. George Yeoman Pocock, the legendary boat builder for Washington, said (page 353): **“Where is the spiritual value of rowing? ... The losing of the self entirely to cooperative effort of the crew as a whole.”** That sounds remarkably close to *Hebrews 3*. Christian maturity isn’t merely individual. It’s deeply communal. We help one another keep rowing. We help one another endure.

3. Hold Firmly as Partners of Christ

Verse 14 says: ***“For we have become partners of Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end.”*** This verse is not teaching salvation by works. The point is not: “Earn your salvation by enduring.” The point is: **Endurance reveals genuine faith.**

True faith continues holding onto Christ – not perfectly, but genuinely. As followers of Christ, we struggle, stumble, suffer, and battle doubt and temptation. But genuine faith keeps returning to Christ, and keeps holding firmly our confidence in what God has done and promised in Christ. And the writer of Hebrews says something remarkable: we have become ***“partners of Christ.”*** That’s an astonishing phrase. Think about partnerships. For example, in marriage. A healthy marriage involves mutual commitment, shared burdens, faithfulness, sacrifice, and perseverance. Marriage is not casual. Partnerships change your identity and responsibilities. Or think about a law firm partnership. Partners share ownership, responsibility, accountability, investment, and reward. No one drifts accidentally into partnership in a law firm. Partnership requires commitment, long hours, and hard work.

Hebrews says **you’re invited to be a partner of Christ.** And while marriage is a partnership of equals, being invited to be a partner of Christ – who Hebrews has told us is superior to prophets, Moses, and even angels – is a privilege, gift, and blessing that’s hard to comprehend. We can be partners of Christ and belong to Christ. We share in His mission. We walk with Him. We participate in His work. And we share in Christ’s promises, his rest, grace, and victory. That’s why perseverance matters.

We hold firmly to the end because Christ is already firmly holding on to us. And one of the ways God helps us endure is through the encouragement of God’s people. We were never meant to row alone.

Hebrews 3 tells us: **Guard your heart, Encourage one another, Hold firmly as partners of Christ.** An untied boat drifts with the current. But a racing shell moves with power, endurance, and unity, because people are pulling together and encouraging one another forward. That’s a picture of the Christian life. Not isolated spirituality. Not passive drifting. But sharing daily encouragement and enduring faith. So, let me leave you with a few questions. Where might your heart be quietly drifting right now? Who knows the state of your soul? Who are you encouraging? Who is

encouraging you? And what would daily encouragement look like, this week? A prayer with someone after worship? A phone call? A text message? An honest conversation?

Hebrews says: **“Exhort one another every day”** because we all need help holding firmly to Christ. And by God’s grace, we can help one another keep rowing until we reach the finish line.

Blessing: **“May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another,** in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that **together** you may **with one voice** glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” **(Romans 15:5-6).**

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. What does it mean to you that you are invited to be “partners of Christ” (*Hebrews 3:1, 14*)? How does that shape your identity and daily life?
2. What does an “evil, unbelieving heart” look like in everyday life (verse 12) — not just in obvious rejection, but in subtle attitudes or habits?
3. What do daily exhortation and encouragement realistically look like in our lives today (verse 13)? How can we move beyond surface-level check-ins to meaningful spiritual support?
4. In what ways is sin “deceitful” (verse 13)? Can you think of examples where something seemed harmless, but slowly pulled you away from God?
5. What helps a person endure in faith over the long term (verse 14)? What tends to weaken that endurance?
6. How can you help yourself and others guard against hardening hearts and stay anchored in Christ? What specific step could you take this week?