

“YET I Will Rejoice”: Encouragement in Anxious Times

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On occasion, I'm told, an ewe gives birth to a lamb whom she rejects. Spurned, alone, and broken in spirit, the little lamb (called a "bummer lamb") is destined to die until the Good Shepherd scoops it up, caresses it to His chest, and takes it home to nurse it to wholeness. Once the lamb is strong enough, the Shepherd returns the "bummer lamb" to the flock. Not surprisingly, when the Shepherd calls His flock, the bummer lamb is first to respond!

Distress in Anxious Times

This Good Shepherd is not of this world, nor are we. For that, the world hates us.[1] Ourselves castaways, we are like bummer lambs. The iconic hymn, *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*, asks "Is there trouble anywhere?" And, indeed, there is. In the words of Thomas Paine, "These are the times that try men's souls."

Prophetically, the global church suffers escalating persecution from without and spiritual deception from within. More often than not, moral relativism trumps biblical mandate. Given misplaced love of money and pleasure, many are preoccupied with materialism. Youth are seduced by scripturally-forbidden, yet culturally-celebrated alternative

lifestyles and “oppositions of science, falsely so called”—i.e., gender dysphoria protocols. Young girls are compelled to forgo modesty along with a fair chance at competing in women’s sports. Increasingly, our culture lacks natural affection—this, demonstrated by influx of human trafficking, open and legal prostitution, quick-fix abortions, no-fault divorce, rampant pornography, substance abuse and addiction. A culture of death reigns supreme, and a contagion of contention attends political posturing. Despite exponentially increased knowledge, our education system is fatally marred by distraction, confusion, violence, and godless indoctrination. In the bogus name of peace, abounding lawlessness invites increasingly totalitarian transnational governance. Add to these: Threat of war and rumors thereof, pesky new strains of disease, and escalating natural calamities.

• **Squeezing and Binding**

We’re not alone. King David also suffered extreme distress. The Hebrew word for distress is *yatsar*, which comes from an Akkadian word that means *to squeeze or bind*. I’m reminded of yesteryear’s corsets typically constructed of a stiff material and structured with boning inserted into channels in the cloth or leather. Corsets are held together by lacing. Picture a lady’s maid tugging and yanking on the laces to create for her mistress a coveted, hour-glass shape. And groan.

Aggressive squeezing and binding can reduce lung capacity and contribute to muscle atrophy, skeletal deformities, and uterine prolapse. But I digress. My point being: Potentially debilitating distress at micro- and macro- levels visits us all—male or female, young or old.

Cry for Encouragement

Jesus was clear: “In this world you will have trouble, but take heart! I have conquered, defeated, and subdued the world.”[2] To this, the Amplified translation adds, “My

conquest is *accomplished*, My victory [over the world] *abiding*.”

Describing the quaking earth's giving way and mountains falling into the heart of the roaring, foaming sea, the psalmist acknowledges God as a fortress and ever-present help in trouble.[3]

Accordingly, numbers of Greek words in the New Testament convey the concept of Holy Spirit's coming alongside in friendship to encourage and comfort. As the Spirit's overshadowing presence surrounded Mary to conceive Christ, Spirit-inspired visions, revelations, strategies and goals are conceived within us. With fruit following.[4]

- **Though ..., Yet ...**

Though we, as believers, are bound and squeezed, yet by Holy Spirit presence and power, we overflow with hope.[5] Hope serves as a firm, secure anchor for the soul; therefore, we're commanded to hold to it staunchly.[6] Faith is the substance, or support, of that hope.[7]

Etymologically, “David” means “beloved”; “Habakkuk means “ardent embrace.” In the face of impending judgment at the hands of Babylon and the Amalekites, respectively, Habakkuk and David cleaved to the Lord and *encouraged themselves* in the love of Him.[8]

Still, in the face of injustice, the prophet Habakkuk lamented, “O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and *You will not hear?*”[9] Habakkuk was a realist. Facing impending judgment at the hand of Babylonians, Habakkuk further acknowledged inadequate harvest workers in empty and barren plow fields—this, coupled with sparse breeding and reproduction of cattle. Yet, by personal choice, Habakkuk purposed to be happy and rejoice.

In fact, the Hebrew rendition of Habakkuk 3: 18-19 depicts his

jumping for joy and spinning about in glee! Through it all.

In like manner, King David encouraged himself while dancing in abandon before the LORD with shouts of joy and with the sound of the trumpet.[10] He was, indeed, a “man after God’s own heart”!

- **Strength in Encouragement**

The word for “encouraged” means “*to strengthen like becoming a rock.*” Its Semitic root carries the *idea of binding*. To bind to an enemy is to be discouraged, but to bind to God is to be strengthened in encouragement. Habakkuk and David both stood before God, bound themselves to Him, and thereby rested encouraged in His presence. Their first thought was God, their rock, their strength, their fortress, and their deliverer.[11]

How to Encourage Ourselves

As David and Habakkuk, we too must *encourage ourselves*. This we do in numerous ways.

- **Is There Trouble Anywhere? Take It to the LORD in Prayer!**

It’s been rightly said, “Worry is a conversation you have with yourself about things you cannot change. Prayer is a conversation you have with God about things He can [and will] change!” With this in view, we bypass anxiety and, in prayer and petition, present our requests to God—always with thanksgiving![12]

- **Positioning Ourselves Aright**

I am “the joy set before Him,” and He is the great I AM.[13] This heartening dynamic invites me to take my rightful place and grasp the emboldening, hope-filled future that God has for me.[14]

By standing with Jesus, gazing upon His beauty, and inquiring of the LORD in His temple, I encourage myself.[15]

Consider John the Baptist who identified himself as “the one who comes before Him.” John was Jesus’ “best man,” if you will. He took his rightful place close by the heavenly Bridegroom. Traditionally, when the voice of the groom is heard, the best man is swept up in the joy of the moment and takes his place center stage along with the bride and attendants, who, in turn, “step to His side.”[16]

While living in the State of Kuwait, I attended a traditional wedding of the Prince of Bahrain with a Kuwaiti royal. This festive occasion uniquely and emphatically demonstrated preeminence of the bridegroom in Eastern culture. Though gloriously and royally arrayed, the demure bride sat to the side and, compared to a Western bride, was afforded little attention. The wait was LONG but, at the bridegroom’s entrance, sheer delight was unmistakable. Strong emotion was expressed in high-pitched, vocal howls, called ululation or trilling, as the wedding party exploded in excitement!

At the side of our heavenly bridegroom, with all eyes fixed on Him, we encourage ourselves in the unflappable hope of what is to come.[17] Doing so, we are strengthened, empowered, encouraged. Our Lord will make our feet like the deer’s that in Him we might tread on (and soar in) high places.[18]

So, then, let’s hear a trill or two!

• **Meditating on the Word and Taking All Thoughts into Captivity**

I’m told that, every day, we entertain some thirty thousand thoughts. Lassoing those thoughts, we purpose to think *continually* on things that are excellent (virtuous) and praiseworthy. Centering our minds on these, we naturally encourage ourselves in the LORD.[19] His Living Word forms and feeds our thoughts. renews our strength, catapults us to glory, and enables us to “run and not be weary, walk and not faint.”[20]

In reading, studying, meditating, and thereby filling our minds with the Word of God, we bring all thoughts into alignment with it. Moreover, we renew our minds with a fresh attitude, mentally and spiritually.[21] “Perfect peace” follows.[22]

We need only fix our thoughts on what is:

- a. true (honest)
- b. honorable (venerable, noble, dignified, worthy of respect)
- c. right (just)
- d. pure and lovely
- e. admirable (of good report/repute, commendable).[23]

• **Disciplining Our God-Given Senses**

Twit Believers also encourage themselves by disciplining their God-given senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste). Sight ranks strongest of the five senses, and no wonder. World-renowned eye surgeon, Dr. Ming Wang (Harvard, MIT) contends that there is absolutely no way the eye’s amazing and logical arrangement of photoreceptors, ganglion cells, and neurons could ever evolve from a random compilation of cells. Darwin himself acknowledged that the complexity of the eye had potential to undermine his theory in its entirety.

Arguably, complexity of a human eye is the most powerful evidence of the existence of God. What we watch, in person or electronically, inspires and shapes our thoughts toward Him. What we choose to behold with the gift of sight can greatly encourage, on one hand, or defile on the other. Little Sunday school children sing about “being careful, little eyes, what you see.” Good comes from disciplining our God-given senses.

• **Seeking Divine Input**

Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is renewed day by day.[24] With that in view, our charge is to

seek and receive Divine input, looking not to the things that are seen, but rather to things unseen by the human eye.[25] When we remain open to God's still, small voice, He communicates in dreams and visions, prophetic words, and exhortation. Added to fitting words in due season, God-dropped words of knowledge, wisdom and revelation afford discernment, leading and access to the very mind of Christ. In receiving Divine input, we celebrate our light, momentary affliction as preparation for "an eternal weight of glory." [26]

- **Eschewing Demonic Input**

Enter, deception. The Bible warns that believers, too, can be enticed by evil desire and thoughts that the enemy implants directly into the mind.[27] Take Judas, for example. Scripture tells us that "Satan entered Judas." [28] Notwithstanding, when Judas secretly betrayed Jesus to His enemies, he alone was responsible for his actions.

In contrast, by eschewing demonic input, we defeat all nefarious plots and encourage ourselves with experiential knowledge that the One in us is greater than he who is in the world! [29]

To bypass shame, we set our faces like flint (a stone or hard rock). [30] In other words, we unyieldingly harden our countenance and, with unshakable resolve, soundly refuse the enemy's suggestions. By intentionally rejecting demonic input, we effectively overcome the world and its pull. [31]

- **Accessing Stored Memories**

Theoretically, our brains hold more information than over 4,000 iPhones. Imagine this: The Comforter brings *all things* to our remembrance. [32] By retrieving and recounting memory of God's wondrous works, we can't help but encourage ourselves and, in turn, edify others. In fact, remembering is scriptural. After God's people passed to the other side of the Jordan River, God commanded twelve men, one from each tribe,

to carry stones from the river on their shoulders and, with them, to set up a memorial to mark God's fulfilling His promise to bring Israel into the Promised Land. This marker declared God's mighty works to future generations.[33]

By way of application, re-reading my written testimony brings to remembrance God's working in my own life. Rehearing and remembering the Lord's goodness encourages me in this life and, as a bonus, leaves a legacy in the wake of it!

- **Being an Encourager to Others**

Barnabas was literally the "son of exhortation." [34] The Biblical word, "exhort," speaks to employing strong encouragement while urging action. It carries with it the sense of pushing forward. Today—all the more as we see the Day of the LORD approaching [35]—sons and daughters of exhortation encourage and propel action with firm belief that He who began a good work in us, in fact, will complete it. [36]

Conclusion

Bummer sheep are born into trouble as the sparks fly upward [37] but, gratefully, they are rescued, nurtured to wholeness, and bound to their Good Shepherd to gain strength like a rock to fulfill their Shepherd's bidding.

The Lord's flock consists of restored bummer sheep charged with the task of encouraging themselves.

After David's example, we encourage ourselves in prayer, establishing right relationship with God, and meditating on His Word. In the face of impending distress, we overcome the tug of sensuality, take captive our wayward thoughts, and vigorously eschew demonic input. By thinking *continually* on things that are excellent (virtuous) and worthy of praise (praiseworthy), by centering our minds on these and implanting them in our hearts, we encourage ourselves in the LORD, seek and remain open to Divine input, entertain glorious testimony,

and reach out to encourage others.

In all things, we rejoice in the Lord. Again, I say, "Rejoice!" Because the LORD is near, we are anxious for nothing while encouraged in all things![38] Jesus commands us to "take heart," or be encouraged. Why?

Because He has overcome the world.[39]

We have reason, do we not, to jump up and spin about in exuberant glee?[40]

Be encouraged, little flock!

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Footnotes:

1 John 17:14-19

2 John 16:33

3 Psalm 46:1-3, 7

4 Luke 1:35

5 Romans 15:13

6 Hebrews 6:19, 11:1, 10:23

7 Hebrews 11:1

8 1 Samuel 30:6

9 Habakkuk 3:17-18

10 2 Samuel 6

11 Psalm 18:1-2

12 Philippians 4:6-7

13 Hebrews 12:2

14 Jeremiah 29:11-13

15 Psalm 27:4

16 John 3:28-30, The Voice

17 Psalm 16:8

18 2 Timothy 4:17; Habakkuk 3:19

19 Philippians 4:8

20 Isaiah 40:28-31
21 Ephesians 4:23
22 Isaiah 26:3
23 Philippians 4:8
24 2 Corinthians 4:16
25 2 Corinthians 4:18
26 2 Corinthians 4:16-18
27 James 1:14
28 Luke 22:3
29 1 John 4:4
30 Isaiah 50:7, Ezekiel 3:8
31 Psalm 119:114-115
32 John 14:25-26
33 Joshua 4:1-3
34 Acts 4:36
35 Hebrews 10:24-25
36 Philippians 1:6
37 Job 5:6-7
38 Philippians 4:4-6
39 John 16:33
40 1 Samuel 30:6