Encouraging Life!

75 uplifting stories

version 2

by Charles W. Gross, Jr.

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A word about these encouraging stories.

God generously blessed me with the gift of encouragement. I can’t possibly thank God enough for this delightful, uplifting gift. It makes me eager to share it. So, after a twenty-year military career and then a twenty-year ministry career, I was praying for a new adventure. I spent hours in my office, reading, thinking, praying, writing, and staring out my window at God’s beautiful creation. In the middle of April 2020, God opened my heart to the realization that I needed new ways of sharing my gift of encouragement. This led to the writing of short episodes of encouraging words. They grew from images from my day, observations from nature, inspiration from the Spirit, and God’s wonderful word. They were first shared through my podcast titled, “Encouraging Words by Charlie Gross.” It’s available on Apple Podcasts. I have links to the podcasts on my website: http://charliegross.com
As you read these short episodes, you may notice that they are written as podcast presentations, for listening. And, if you listen to them, you’ll probably agree with one of my student ministry supervisors when he said, “Charlie, you speak like a farmer, a boy from the country.” And he’s right of course, that’s how I speak, (though I wasn’t raised on a farm) but the far deeper question is: Have I communicated? Did the point stick? Are you encouraged? That’s what matters. So, my deepest hope is that you’re encouraged, lifted up, and inspired by these stories. From my heart to yours. Charlie Gross

Note: These seventy-five stories were published in two separate books. The first titled, Encouragement: hope for your path, on July 28, 2020, contained the first thirty-nine. The second titled, Encouragement and Hope: God’s word for everyday life, on October 18, 2020, contained the next thirty-six. Version 2 corrects some errors in Ver 1.
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Encouragement from Second Kings

2 Kings 6:15-17 (NIV), “When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. “Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?” the servant asked. “Don’t be afraid,” the servant answered. “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” And Elisha prayed, “Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see.” Then the Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.”

Today, you may be seeing an army surrounding you - whether it’s food insecurity, dwindling bank accounts, illness, sickness, a virus, addictions, frazzled relationships, aches, pains, loneliness, depression or a dead-end job. The army comes in many forms.
When you ask, “What shall we do?” the answer comes from Elisha, the prophet, “Don’t be afraid! Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” He points to the Lord of hosts who does battle FOR us.

As it says in 2 Chronicles 20:15, “... Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s.” Trust Him. Lean on Him. Place your Faith in Him. He will never ever ever leave you or forsake you. Be encouraged for this day.
Encouragement from a Mourning Dove

God blessed me with the gift of encouragement! So, rather than waste it, bury it or squander it, I thought I should find ways of using it. What better time than April 2020 amid the Coronavirus stay-at-home order. We all need encouraged and inspired. Well, over the past weeks I’ve spent a lot of time in my office. My office faces west and has two large windows to the backyard and overlooks our pond less waterfall feature. I love watching the birds splash and play in the water and just hang out near the babbling brook. In particular, there’s been a loving pair of mourning doves enjoying the water and sitting beside each other in the sun. Well, in the past few days, I’ve seen just one mourning dove very very busy. I presume it’s the male building the nest for his bride. Here’s why. He flies into the mulch area, then picks at small sticks seven or eight times until he gets a perfect one. Then he flies the
fifty feet or so to the nest. He comes back in a few seconds and repeats that – peck, peck, peck and picks up a stick, and flies to the nest. Now I have watched him do this for dozens and dozens of times a day, for days on end. He’s focused. He’s a builder and he’s a provider. Quite frankly, he’s an inspiration. So, here’s the takeaway. We can learn tenacity, focus, and perseverance from this mourning dove. Life and faith and character and hope are built day by day, hour by hour, through the little things we do, over and over and over. Through daily devotions, through saying, “I love you,” through saving even a little bit of money, through worship, through Bible studies, through calls, through cards and through random acts of kindness. So, keep at it my friends. Keep peck, peck, pecking and building your nest of faith, hope and love. We grow daily in faith, hope and love by peck, peck, pecking and picking up our sticks. Have a phenomenal and encouraging day!
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Encouraged by a Zelkova Tree

So, it was Saturday April 18, 2020. It’s 42 degrees outside with a 17-mph wind. I’m staring out my office window, watching the trees sway in the stiff breeze. One catches my attention – our towering Zelkova tree. It’s firmly rooted at the base of our pond less waterfall. Probably been there for 15 or 16 years. It’s many branches wave and sway in the wind, but they also welcome birds for a rest stop. Every year these branches seem to compete with one another to produce leaves. Some leaf earlier and some leaf later, but eventually, they all leaf out in breath-taking beauty. But now, as I reflect on the beautiful Zelkova, here’s where my mind goes. Trees are planted in one particular spot. They don’t fuss, fight or argue about the spot. They just accept their lot. They are given a deep hole, soil, water and sunshine and take it from there. They then fulfill their God given purpose in life. They grow roots to anchor themselves. They grow in stature. They branch out. They produce colorful leaves
and they thrive in the precise spot where they’ve been planted. And in that one spot, they weather the wind, the rain, the sleet, the hail, the snow, the baking sun and the dry summer days. And through it all...... yes, and through it all, they continue to do what they’ve been planted to do. They fulfill their purpose in life.

So, listen. Believe it or not, you too have been planted in a spot to take root, to grow in stature, to send out branches, to weather the storms of life and to produce fruit that only you can produce. Yes, the world needs your fruit and the world needs your produce. So, take heart my friends. It may be lonely, it may be dreary, it may even be teary. You may be facing fierce winds, chaotic change, unforeseen upheavals or even an emotional drought. These come and these go, and they will eventually pass, but the world is waiting expectantly to see your leafy beauty. So, stand tall in the winds of life, and have a firmly rooted week in the Lord of abundant life! Shalom my friends.
Encouraged by Psalm 23:1

Psalm 23:1, “The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.” (NIV, CEB)

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.” (KJV, ESV, KJ21)

“Jehovah is my shepherd; I shall not want.” (ASV)

Today, as we say this one verse, over and over during the day, notice that the NIV and CEB versions of the Bible point to our present condition. When the Lord is your shepherd, you have everything you need. There is nothing we need. There is nothing we lack. We have the health we need. We have the wisdom we need. We have the courage we need. We have the wealth we need. We have the support we need. We have the forgiveness we need. We have the peace we need. Now, notice that in the KJV, ESV, KJ21 and ASV versions, they point us
to a helpful command, a spiritual mandate, a way of living and being. They tell us, “I shall not want.” Ok, but the only way this makes sense is for us to realize that, when the Lord of the universe IS our shepherd, we do indeed HAVE everything we need. We have security, we have protection, we have peace, we have wholeness and we have abundant and eternal life. Can we experience more encouragement than that? Have an encouraging day with the Lord as your shepherd.
Encouragement from Hebrews 13:8

Today’s encouraging words come from Hebrews 13:8. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” Let me tell you why that is soooo encouraging. That means that the one who created you, the one who loves you, the one who cares deeply for you, the one who came to earth to be with you, the one who shows you how to live, thrive and serve, the one who suffered bled and died for you, the one who took all your sins, past, present and future on his bloody back, the one who paid your sin debt, the one who makes you righteous, holy and clean before Almighty God, the one who sets you free to live vibrantly, contagiously and energetically, the one who prepares a place for you in your eternal home. Yea, that one! That one is Jesus Christ, the One who is the same yesterday, today and forever. Friends, you are loved with an everlasting love. And that love is the same yesterday, today and
forever. THAT........ is encouraging. Have an amazing and encouraging week in Christ’s never ending, never changing love.
Encouragement from a Testimony

I was deeply touched and encouraged today by a simple short testimony after our Zoom church service. Here’s how it went. A nurse from our congregation, currently serving at the front lines of the Coronavirus battle, stood up, moved closer to the camera and said, “The church gave us money to enjoy a meal this week. I just want to say “thank you.” It really means a lot to us.” ……. Isn’t that simply beautiful, touching and encouraging? Just a three-sentence testimony of thank you for what the body of Christ did for her family. I felt choked up at that tender moment. A heart-felt thank you to God’s people, the hands and feet of Jesus Christ. Then I thought, wow! Even though the pastor’s message was excellent, this testimony really preaches! Really encourages. Really touches the heart. It reminded me of a Sunday many years ago as a seminary intern. I finally got a chance to preach. I worked
hard on my sermon and poured my heart and soul into the preaching. Now also included in that worship service was a brief testimony of how God richly blessed a young couple who were struggling financially. This too was a special, tender moment. Well, after the benediction, the senior pastor and I made our way to the exit door to greet the congregation. You can imagine my hopes, as a seminary intern, to hear some encouraging words about my sermon. But...... alas...... mostly what I heard was this..... “Wasn’t that a powerful testimony?” Wasn’t that a powerful testimony? And, yes, I had to admit it..... it really was. Simple, heart-felt stories make a lasting impact on us. So, friends, here’s what I’ve learned..... One of the most encouraging things you can do is “tell others how they’ve blessed your life, tell others how God has blessed your life, and tell others how Christ has enriched you, changed you and blessed your life.” When you do this, when you share your own simple
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testimony of encouraging words, you will be lifted, inspired and encouraged. Friends have an encouraging week as you dare to share.
Encouragement from Grandkids

A few weeks ago, my wife and I received an email from our daughter-in-law telling us about a new app called Messenger Kids. She said that our 7 and 9-year-old granddaughters would be using it to keep in touch. Wow! Have they ever! Since that new communication avenue opened up, we’ve received an avalanche, a tsunami of stickers, memes, funny faces, videos, texts and sincere questions like “how are you today pop pop?” or “how are you mom mom?” It’s almost a daily routine of being checked on, thought of and cared for. Friends, do you realize how powerful this is? Especially in this time of staying at home, social distancing, with few occasions for that much needed personal touch. Do I have to say it? I’m blessed beyond words. I’m deeply touched and encouraged by my granddaughters who care, share and keep in touch. This reminds me of two things. Thing one is that wildly
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inspirational passage of hope in Isaiah 11:6. It says, “The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.” Yes, friends, a little child shall lead them. The innocence and tenderness of a little child, just keeping in touch. Thing two is a reminder of Garrison Keillor’s sign off from his popular radio show, “Be well, do good work and keep in touch.” Be well, do good work and keep in touch. Friends, we are formed in God’s image to be in relationships...... and relationships only grow, thrive and survive when we keep in touch. So today, I pray that you are encouraged and blessed. I pray that you stay well and keep in touch. Have an encouraging week.
Encouragement from a Bulgarian Artist

Lisa and I love to travel. We really do. We’ve been on many many cruises, we’ve been to Europe many times and we yearn to get back out there in the world, when it’s safe to go. But, while we wait, we travel virtually by watching the Rick Steves travel episodes on Prime video. Last night we were watching an episode on Bulgaria. Rick took us to a museum and spoke briefly about an inspirational and encouraging Bulgarian artist, named Zlatyu Boyadzhiev. I hope I’m not butchering his name too badly. Let me tell you about Zlatyu. He was born in 1903 and graduated in 1932 from the Academy of Fine Arts in Sophia, Bulgaria. He painted beautiful, breathtaking portraits and landscapes in the neoclassical style of the old town Plovdiv. He was becoming quite accomplished and famous. Then in 1951 he suffered a paralyzing stroke. This stroke took away the use of his artistic right hand.
After a couple of years of recovering, still without the use of his right hand, he switched to his left hand, changed his style to bolder, brighter colors and was more expressionistic. Reminded me of Van Gogh. In other words, he adapted to his new limitation and again excelled as an artist. Sooooo, here’s where I get encouraged. Zlatyu Boyadzhiev did not stop creating works of art, even though his artistic right hand was taken away from him by a stroke. He took stock of what he still had and continued to paint and create. So, my friends, today, the thought to ponder is this: What limitations are you now experiencing? Are you experiencing physical limitations? Financial limitations? Emotional limitations? Relational limitations? Social, stay at home limitations? And the deeper questions are, “Have these limitations stopped your painting and creating? What does it look like in your life to take stock of what you have ……. and continue…….. maybe in a different, bolder, more expressionistic
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style? I personally look forward to what the “new you might do!” And...... so does the world. It looks forward to what the new you might do. Have an encouraging - perhaps left-handed week.
Encouragement from Friends

And once again I’m reminded of the power of giving, serving, and contributing to others. You see, I recently started this podcast series titled, Encouraging Words by Charlie Gross. I wrote a few short, simple podcasts designed to inspire and encourage listeners. I posted them on iTunes and promoted them on Facebook. For me, they were brief observations from life that encouraged me along the way. Little did I know that I would receive many notes, likes, compliments and encouraging words from friends and listeners. Simply by trying to be an encourager..... I was encouraged. Simply by offering words of encouragement....... I received massive doses of encouragement. And, you know what? This reminds me of the fact that this has been a recurring drum beat and constant theme in my life. The more I try to give, the more God showers me with gifts. When I meagerly try to bless others, God abundantly
blesses me. Over 20 years ago, prior to seminary, I ventured into some prison ministry. It was a daunting experience to hear the large metal bars clanging closed behind me, but as I sat and prayed with a young female inmate with ties to our church, she told me that I was an answer to prayer. She said that she had asked God to send someone to visit her, pray with her and offer some hope and encouragement. ...... I was that person. So, darn it...... it happened again. I wanted to be the encourager, the helper, the lay minister, but it came back on me many-fold. I once hear a story of a country preacher who served a very poor, rural area. He and his son entered a small country church on a Sunday morning to preach and lead worship. On the way in he dropped a couple of dollars in the offering plate, placed by the door. After worship, as he and his son were leaving, he picked up the same 2 dollars he had dropped in the plate. His son looked up at his father and said, “I
guess if you had put more in, you would have gotten more out.” Isn’t that so true? Friends, you know what to do. You all have the time, the talents, and the treasures to give...... and the more you give, the more you get. You can’t possibly out give God! Have an encouraging week!
Encouraged by Grandma Truxal

My grandma Truxal was such a fun, lovable encourager. She loved to laugh, had a deep strong faith and always did what she could for her family. I loved to visit grandma and just sit with her and laugh. I personally think it was her laugh that gave her long life. Boy could she laugh. And boy could she live. She laughed almost up to her last day, which was months after she had celebrated her 100th birthday. Well, my grandma encouraged me in so many ways. I’ll just share one. So, listen.

The clicking you hear is from grandma’s portable Underwood typewriter. I did a little research on this beauty and found that it was produced in the 1930s or 1940s. I just love the solid feel. Well, it was about 55 years or so ago that grandma surprised me and blessed me with her typewriter. Little did she know that she not only blessed me but
encouraged me and challenged me. You see, at the time, I was somewhere around 6th or 7th grade and typing classes didn’t start until 9th grade. Sooooo, taking on the challenge, I found a typing for dummies book (though they didn’t call it that, back then), and started teaching myself to touch type. Learned to position my left hand fingers on the letters, A, S, D, F and my right hand fingers on J, K, L, ; . It took a little while, but I stuck with it. I started typing everything. Silly notes, index cards, to do lists, homework, letters and whatever I could dream up. Everything got typed. Yea, I could type without looking at my fingers. I don’t know if I have to tell you how valuable this skill has been for me. Grandma Truxal’s encouragement and challenge made a powerful, positive, life-long impact on me. She blessed me with a resource that spurred me on to learn, grow and develop a skill that lasted a lifetime. Even today, this simple gift makes me pause and think.......... How could I pass on
grandma’s encouraging legacy? Who could I bless, inspire, encourage, and challenge? Friends think about it. You know a child of God or you will cross paths with a child of God who simply needs a resource, a challenge, a blessing, and encouragement. You may powerfully and positively change the future, through your genuine generosity. You’ll never know. So, while you ponder this,..... have an encouraging week.
Encouraged by David

In my Bible reading today I came across a powerfully encouraging story about King David. I could also call this episode, encouragement from a real leader. Let me set the stage for you. In 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21, the same story is shared. This story starts with David ordering Joab and his commanders to go, count the Israelites and report back the number. Joab resisted and knew it was wrong, knew it would anger the Lord, but was forced to go. So, this story shows a weak, sinful side of David. Now this podcast is called ‘encouraged by David,’ so you’ll have to wait for that encouragement, but since this starts with the weak, sinful side of David, we can all get onboard and relate. Too often we do what is counter to fully trusting and relying on God. You see, by David counting the Israelites, he was placing his confidence, trust and hope in the sheer number of people, the number of his troops.
He was placing his confidence in human effort rather than in God’s hands. I know I can relate to this, can you? Now the real tragedy of this sin, the result of David’s sin caused a plague that killed 70,000 people. 70,000. So, with that horrible set up, let’s find the encouragement. The encouragement comes in at least two ways. First, we see close up how the real battles in life belong to the Lord. The Lord God Almighty, the Lord of heaven and earth is the only one we need on our side...... no matter how daunting, no matter how overwhelming, or no matter how scary the situation. So when we’re tempted to take stock of our assets, remember this:.... The battle belongs to the Lord. The battle belongs to the Lord. When we’re tempted to rely on our own strength, pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps, remember, “if God is FOR us, (and he is) who can be against us?” There is nothing in this world greater than God and there is no one we will face in this world who
is greater than God. So, when we’re tempted to count, take stock, pile up our earthly resources...... just stop, breathe and “be still and know” .... that God is all powerful, God is almighty, and God is FOR you. Secondly, when we read further, we see David fully accepting responsibility for his sin. David says to the Lord, “I have sinned; I, the shepherd have done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? Let your hand fall on me and my family, but do not let this plague remain on your people.” David accepted full responsibility for his sin. Friends, that’s what real leaders do. Real leaders don’t duck responsibility. Real leaders don’t shift the blame. Real leaders don’t find scape goats. Real leaders don’t ever say, “I take no responsibility.” And real leaders don’t even say, “the devil made me do it,” which if you read 1 Chronicles 21:1 where it says, “Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel,” it sounds like a legitimate excuse. Yea, real
leaders don’t even go there. They just take responsibility. So my hope is that even from this tragic story from King David, we may find encouragement to grow in our leadership capacity. May you have a God-centered encouraging week.
Encouraged by Location

I discovered a really cool compass app on my iPhone the other day. It’s very sensitive, tells the precise direction it is facing, tells the longitude and latitude to the seconds and even tells the elevation. So, as I sit at my Bombay Company office desk (for which I’m still grateful to my wife Lisa), I see that I’m facing 249 degrees, which is basically west. I’m located at 40 degrees, 3 minutes and 25 seconds North and 76 degrees, 25 minutes and 6 seconds West. And, I’m perched at 530 feet elevation. Well that’s probably more than you cared to know, but here’s the thing..... Location matters. I know it’s cliché but just as the realtors all say.... It’s location, location, location. So, today’s encouragement comes from location and here’s why. As I sit here at my desk, facing 249 degrees, I see the birds playing in our pond less waterfall, but there’s something special about their location. The lovey dovey
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mourn ing doves hang out together, flutter about and stay close. They just seem to BE THERE for one another. Where one goes, the other goes. They stay together in the same location. And, the cardinals are doing the same thing. Mama cardinal and her bright red mate stay close and watch out for one another. Where one goes, the other goes. Just yesterday these two red birds were bathing at the same time. It was so adorable. It was like one of them, probably mama, said, “ok, let’s get cleaned up, let’s get cooled off and let’s get the world’s dust off our feathers.” And of course her mate says, “oh ok.” So, I watched them splashing and bathing close together, not more than 6 feet apart. Friends, there is power in proximity. There is power in presence. We are better together. Do you see why location, staying together is vital? God knows this fact and designed us to be close and to stay together. That is exactly why God sent his Son to live among us. He sent his Son, Jesus Christ to
come close to us, to be with us in our earthly location, to reinforce the power of presence. The gospel of John, chapter 1, verse 14 tells us this as it describes Jesus Christ as the Word of God. The Message puts it this way, “The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood.” The Lord knows the importance of location and chose not to stay aloof and away, but to move in close, like next door. God wants to live beside you, chat with you in the backyard, share in backyard barbeques, let your kids play on his swings and pick up your paper when you’re away. Yea, God wants to be close, to show you, firsthand, his love and compassion. Location is important. So, we see from the birds and from the birds’ creator the power of presence and the life-giving love of location. My only question for you is this:....... Who, in your life, will you stay close to and encourage? Friends have an encouraging week in your location.
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Encouraged by Pivot Points

Today I want to open up a Grand Canyon of encouragement for you in the concept I call, ‘pivot points.’ Let me explain how I’m using this term. By pivot points I mean those moments in life that could go one way or the other. Turning points, shakeups, doors opened, doors closed, decision points, taking a step, or missing a step, lightbulb moments, flashes of insight, or even smashing your forehead and saying, “duh!” That’s what I mean by pivot points. You see, we don’t usually think of life in terms of pivot points. Life is often seen more as routine, a daily grind, or a repeated “Ground hog day,” but in reality, many times, every single day we face pivot points. So in our lifetime we’ve all experienced thousands and thousands of pivot points. Let me share a few of mine, a few from the Bible and then give you an encouraging challenge. In 5th grade, I watched others selected to be student
crossing guards, getting fancy white belts with shiny badges. I was envious for I wasn’t selected. So, I made the case that a guard was needed at an alley that led to school. I asked for the job and received it and got the belt and the badge. I applied for a full Air Force scholarship to attend Grove City College and got it! After passing my flight evaluation to be a C-130 aircraft commander, I partied so hardy that the next day I couldn’t get off the couch to play with my kids. My eyes were opened to my idiotic, selfish behavior, so I quit drinking for about 15 years. In 2010, my position as Associate Executive Presbyter was eliminated. After weeks of processing that crushing news, I was called to be the pastor at West Grove Presbyterian Church. A call I just loved! Now these are only a few pivot points for me, but there are literally thousands of these in my life and yours. Let’s turn to some Biblical pivot points. God told Abraham that he’d be blessed with as many offspring as the stars in the sky.
Abraham believed God which created a faith-filled trajectory in his life. When Solomon was made king of Israel, God told him to ask for whatever he wanted. What a pivot point. He asked for wisdom and knowledge to lead. God gave him that PLUS more wealth than could be imagined. Then of course there’s the prodigal son – the one who wasted his inheritance in wild living. His pivot point came in a mucky, yucky, pig trough. It simply says, “he came to his senses.” He could have been stuck there for life, but he came to his senses and was warmly welcomed home. When Saul was on the road to Damascus to kill more Christians, he was blinded by the light of Jesus Christ. He was changed in an instant, pivoted and became zealous to spread the good news about God’s love in Jesus Christ. Oh, I could go on and on. Read it and be amazed at real lives experiencing pivot points like your own. Lastly, the life of Jesus. Facing pivot points daily, Jesus broke rule after rule after rule, to
love and heal people. He crossed cultural and religious boundaries to love sinners, love tax collectors, love broken women, love lepers and love the demon possessed. Jesus pivoted to say absolutely nothing when accused of crimes punishable by death. Jesus pivoted every time to love unconditionally. And Jesus even pivoted to forgive his murderers while hanging on the cross. Sooooooo, when we see what’s possible in pivot points of life...... How do we pivot today toward the positive? How do we use pivot opportunities creatively? How will we pivot toward unconditional love? Hey, listen! Your adventure in encouragement is about to take a lightyear leap ....... solely based on your response to this pivotal point in your life. Have an amazing week.
Encouraged by Nature

After a prolonged period of being stuck inside, with stay at home orders, self-quarantine after our cruise, the bitter cold, rainy and windy spring weather, it’s exhilarating to get outside and enjoy a bike ride on the Northwest Lancaster county river trail. The sun glistened in the pure blue sky, a gentle breeze blew across my handlebars, squirrels scampered across the path and I breathed in boat loads of fresh air. Nature just screamed “yes, yes, yes!” In fact, I believe it was nature that was singing that verse from Psalm 118, “This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.” This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. I joined nature’s choir and proclaimed to myself, who else but the Lord could make a day like today? Yea, on days like this it’s so easy and natural to sing God’s praises, to exalt the Almighty creator! Seeing at least 40 shades of green,
Charles W. Gross, Jr.

sensing the serene Susquehanna, feeling the cool spring breeze and pedaling past cardinals and gold finches scrambling for breakfast..... my mind bursts with joy. My heart smiles and giggles. My soul succumbs to perfect peace, for God is playfully revealing his artistry, imagination and creativity on the stage that scrolls out before me. Theologians call this “God’s general revelation or God’s natural revelation.” But no matter what it’s called, with so many natural beautiful pieces of God’s three-dimensional artwork of life in full view....... I’m humbled and worshipful. And... if we’re brutally honest, we must admit and confess “THERE IS a generous, creative, glorious and loving Almighty God!” There IS a mind-blowing, eternally existent creative genius behind the sights, smells, and sounds that surround me and surprise me. There just is. So with that humble confession, with that call to worship, with that admission that we’re NOT the center of the universe, our
encouragement comes in realizing that God’s revelation of his grandeur and greatness is a present for us to unwrap today and is a promise for us to unwrap tomorrow. We’re simply gifted each day to acknowledge God, love God, enjoy God and share our breathtaking moments with God. And, finally, that encouragement reminds me of Psalm 118:29, “Give thanks to the Lord for he is good. His love endures forever.” Give thanks to the Lord for he is very good and his love endures forever. Friends, be lifted by that, be thrilled by that, be encouraged by that and have an encouraging week..... with fully open senses to God’s beauty!
Encouraged by Great Expectations

The FedEx truck is coming today! The FedEx truck is coming today! I’m so excited – I’m so eager! – I have great expectations of what FedEx is bringing and that encourages me. I don’t think I’d surprise you when I say, “you’re encouraged – you’re energized, you’re super excited, when you have great, positive expectations, when you look forward with hope! You absolutely know this. Think about kids leading up to Christmas day! Think about your hopes, dreams and energy level during the months, weeks, and days leading up to a big vacation. You’re pepped up by great expectations. Or, look at your energy level during the workday when you’re looking forward to a night out with friends, versus another routine night of chores around the house. It’s all about great expectations. They are so encouraging. You know this. Great positive expectations drive us, fuel us, sustain us and of course,
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encourage us. You know this well and so do successful businesses. The great ones are all about creating hopeful, positive, exciting expectations and then meeting them or exceeding them. Like when your Amazon order is perfectly correct and delivered within two days. Like when your reserved table is ready when you arrive. Like when your steak is cooked perfectly and melts in your mouth. Like when the hotel clerk calls you by name. So, listen friends, to be encouraged and to be an encourager, is to create expectations that you meet and exceed. Like when you keep your word. Like when you show up on time. Like when you follow through. Like when you do what you can to help and serve. Like when you check in with folks to see what they need and to see how you’re doing. Creating and exceeding expectations. This encourages you and encourages others! Even Almighty God creates great expectations by promising us an abundant and eternal life and all we have to do is – believe! Believe! Simply
believe! Believe he sent his only Son, Jesus Christ to die in our place for our sins. Believe that Jesus Christ goes to prepare a place for us and believe that Christ will lead us into a good, glorious, eternal future. So, my friends, believe.... Be at peace and be encouraged as you live with great expectations and as you create and meet expectations for others! Oh... the FedEx truck did come today, and I was super encouraged! I got a new Sony 4K video camera! I can’t wait to try it out. I’m super excited and super encouraged. Meanwhile, have an amazing and encouraging week as you live with great expectations!
Encouraged by Believing One Thing

I’m totally encouraged by believing one thing. Just one. Just one thing. And I just know you’ll be encouraged, too, if you believe this one thing. I just know it. So, I’m going to tell you. I’m going to tell you the one thing,….. but before I do, I have to know…… do you trust me? Do you have full confidence in me? Do you believe that I tell the truth? Do you believe I have your best interest in mind? Do you trust that I speak the truth in love? Yea, I know, I know…. Those are a lot of questions, but here’s the deal. If your answer to those last five questions was YES, then you’re ready. You’re ready to believe one thing. You’re ready to be encouraged and believe the one thing that will totally revolutionize your life. I’m so excited for you..... are you ready?

Here it is. The one thing to believe is that God loves you. God loves you. God loves you so fully, so deeply, so eternally that he
created you in his own image, that he wrote you a love letter in his Holy Scriptures (the Bible), that he sent a living love letter to you in his Son Jesus Christ. Yea, he loves you to the moon and back. You only have to believe one thing. Just believe this one thing that you are so completely loved that no matter what happened in the past, no matter what is happening around you now, and no matter what will happen in the future, you have been loved you, you are loved and you will be loved. Just believe this one thing. Believe that God’s love is inescapable and believe that God, in Jesus Christ, even died for you so you will live eternally. Yea friends believe this one thing. Believe this one thing and see the difference it makes in your life. Believe this one thing and see the difference it makes in your relationships, in your work and in your studies. Friends, believe this one thing and be supercharged and super encouraged not only this week, but forever.
Encouraged by Perspective

This morning as Lisa and I pedaled long the Northwest Lancaster County River Trail, I was suddenly encouraged by a new perspective; a different, larger point of view. It was exhilarating. Here’s what happened. As I biked along gazing at the breath-taking expanse of wheat fields, I was suddenly whisked away – transported to an outer space view of the whole wide beautiful world. Maybe this was from watching the SpaceX launch on Saturday, but when I saw life from this new perspective, I was super encouraged. Super encouraged I tell you. I was super encouraged because just for a tiny sliver of time, just for a minute moment, I realized that this whole wide wonderful world was created for our enjoyment, our diligent stewardship, and our never ending praise of its creator, Almighty God. Oh, I hope I’m saying this well enough, so you’ll be encouraged, too. You see when we change
our perspective and see the astounding height and breadth and depth of the wide wide world, the opportunities and possibilities are endless! With a new perspective, we can live anywhere, we can go anywhere, we can serve anywhere, and we can care anywhere for God’s good good creation! Genesis tells us that God placed us in a bountiful abundant garden to enjoy it and be fruitful. This means that we don’t have to live in a fetal, helpless, hopeless, hapless position, looking down with a frown, murmuring, “poor me.” We don’t have to be stuck in a rut or a rudderless routine, living without hope. No, not at all! We can abound with a new perspective. Now for me, I don’t know if it was the SpaceX launch, the astronauts, Bob and Doug, the fresh 50 degree air or the precious, powerful presence of the Holy Spirit that whisked me away to a new perspective, but it sure was an encouraging momentary voyage. I was super blessed and super encouraged by this new perspective.
Sooooo. Your challenge, my friends, is to get a new larger, broader, more grandiose perspective. Go up a step ladder. Get on the balcony. Take a trip. Read a book. See a movie. Listen to a podcast. Call a friend, read some scriptures, and say a prayer and ask God for a new perspective. No matter how you get this new perspective, be encouraged my friends with the vast vast multitude of possibilities and opportunities before you. Then have an amazing and encouraging week!
Encouraged by Vultures

I looked up and there they were! Just by looking up. By looking up I saw the funniest, but most useful images this morning. Yea, simply by looking up. Ok, let me give you some context, fill you in on what I saw and then tell you why they were so useful. First, the context. By now, if you’re a podcast listener, it will be no surprise to tell you that Lisa and I were on the Northwest Lancaster County River Trail. This morning we started our bike ride at Marietta’s riverfront park and road northwest. It was 68 degrees, with a 10 mile per hour wind, on a damp trail from the early morning rain. Exhilarating. Now, the trail parallels the Susquehanna river on the left and a train track on the right. The tracks are still used, but we haven’t seen a train in a while. These tracks have large old metal structures overhead for power lines. It’s these looming metal giants that caught my attention this morning as I looked up. But it
wasn’t just the old rusty beams that caught my attention, it was the creatures perched on top. On many of these large metal beams, there were Turkey vultures, also referred to as Turkey buzzards hanging out. And I mean hanging out. Now it’s not unusual to see these mammoth black buzzards, but this morning it was different. This morning most of them had their backs to the sun and had their wings spread out wide or had their wings spread out and drooping over their perches. They were literally hanging out, drying out their wings and soaking up some solar energy to warm up. I thought it was comical. It made me smile, but for them it’s purely practical. So, let me tell you why this image is useful to us. In Stephen Covey’s 1989 book, “The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People,” he names one habit – sharpening the saw. By sharpening the saw, Mr. Covey means spending time each day or each week increasing your skills, increasing your effectiveness, widening your wisdom,
honring your expertise, even drying your wings, and soaking up some solar energy. Sharpening your saw is a powerful reminder to spend time reading, listening, thinking, and deepening your God-given abilities. Sharpening your saw means spending time expanding, growing, blossoming, and blooming where you’ve been planted. Sharpening your saw makes you far more effective and efficient in your God-given talents. So, I thank God for causing me to look up this morning and smiling at Turkey vultures hanging out, doing some wing drying. My hope for you is that you too may look up, dry your wings, soak up some sunshine, sharpen your saw and be encouraged. Have an encouraging week.
Encouraged by Cards and Notes

I don’t know where I got the idea, I read it or heard it on a podcast, but it’s a great one, so here it is. To boost your encouragement, to ratchet up your confidence, to toughen your tenacity, start a collection of your “thank you cards.” Start a collection of the notes, cards, thank yous, emails, texts or personal mementos from those you’ve blessed along life’s journey. These personal touches are living proof, live physical exhibits, excellent evidence that God used you in some positive way to love or bless or impact another’s life. This collection is a living legacy of the difference you’ve made in the world, in real, live, flesh and blood humanity. You can use any storage idea, a notebook, a basket, a bin, a box, or whatever. But for your encouragement, start one today. I’ve been using a 1” 3 ring binder and I love it. I call it “celebrating life’s journey.” So, here’s the usefulness and the encouragement. When
you’re at a low point in life, when you’re feeling depressed or useless or down and out, pull out your collection and remember how God used you in the past. Remember the people who think about you, send you cards, notes, birthday wishes, whatever. Read the notes of your personal touches or from those who personally touch you. You’ll remember with joy what God did in you and through you to impact his people. You’ll remember with joy what God did for you through others. The collection and memories will lift your spirits, spur you on and encourage you. It may even ignite your imagination in creative ways to reach out and be an encourager. And it may jog your memory to write a note of thanks or encouragement to someone who made a difference in YOUR life. A verse from God’s word comes to mind from 1 Thessalonians 5:11, “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” So….my friends, what are you waiting for? Start your
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collection today, right now. Be encouraged my friends and be an encourager! Have a phenomenally encouraging week!
Encouraged by Hitching a Ride

Yesterday I watched a spotted lanternfly hitch a 5-mile ride on Lisa’s back. She was wearing a white top, so it was obvious, I couldn’t miss it. It was right square in the middle of her back, just riding along. We had just turned around at our 5-mile point on the bike trail and out of nowhere, there it was, the large delta winged lanternfly on her back. I watched with amusement as it road along, but kept thinking, surely it would jump off at any moment..... but nooooo. It stayed on for the full 26 minutes until we stopped. So, if you know me by now, it got me thinking. It got me thinking about hitching a ride. What did I know about hitching a ride? Well for starters, it reminded me of my childhood days in East Petersburg where on snowy nights, we would hitch rides on cars with our sleds. We would jump on our sleds and grab the bumper of a slow-moving car and then hang on. True, it wasn’t the smartest thing
we ever did, but luckily, no one I knew was ever injured or killed. Next it reminded me of my 1971 freshman year at Grove City College. I didn’t have a car yet and missed my girlfriend, Lisa. So, on a few occasions I’d hitch a ride home to see her. It seemed safer back in the early 70s and again, luckily, I was never mugged, robbed, or killed. Then in my military days, there was a famous saying that to climb the ranks the fastest, hitch yourself to a rising star. In other words, work for a fast burner, someone on their way to full colonel or the rank of general. You hitch a ride on their coat tails. Oh, I have more ideas about this, too. In a non-attached hitching a ride sort of way, you see this in cycle racing or car racing. When a cycle or car rides closely behind another rider, they’re reducing their own drag and hitching a ride to save energy. Ok, one more before I conclude. If you’re an investor, you certainly try to hitch a ride by investing in those stocks, bonds or companies that are up and coming.
and rising rapidly in value. So, I’ve almost exhausted my “hitching a ride” ideas..... but I do have one more and this is the most important, the most vital, the most critical one. Listen closely to this idea, it has huge, eternal consequences. My last idea is this. As mere sinful, broken human beings, according to the truth in God’s word – the only way we have for a forgiven, holy, righteous, eternal life is by hitching a ride with God’s saving Son, Jesus Christ. You see, Jesus Christ was the one, perfect, sinless man/God who lived among us, showed us how to live, showed us how to love, showed us how to serve, and then died in our place. He took our sins and gave us His righteousness. So, our only way to abundant life and eternal life is to hitch a ride with Jesus Christ. Hitch a ride with the one true rising bright morning star. Hitch a ride with Jesus who conquers death and the grave by God’s resurrection power. We hitch a ride with Jesus simply by faith in Jesus Christ! So,
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my friends, for your eternal encouragement, hitch a ride! Hitch a ride with Jesus Christ! Then have an encouraging week!
Encouraged by Showing Up

Today’s encouragement comes from two simple words – show up. Show up. Now this is a double edged sword or two sides of the same coin, because we’ll see how encouraged you get when others show up for you and of course the flip side is how encouraging you can be when you show up for others. Let’s take a look. Have you ever tried to get painting contractor or handy man estimates for a home project? How many estimates did you get? How many contractors showed up? Do you see why I say showing up is encouraging? Have you ever gone to a friend’s birthday party and hardly anyone showed up? You try to be upbeat and liven it up, but deep inside you’re sad and discouraged. Showing up is encouraging. Woody Allen said it well – He said, “80% of life is just showing up.” 80% of life is just showing up. Think about that. I think he nailed it. In the years leading up to seminary,
I was doing some prison ministry and hospital ministry. On one occasion, I got past the huge clanging metal doors in the Lancaster County prison and started a visit with an inmate. In the course of the discussion, I was told that I was an answer to prayer. This inmate had been praying for someone to show up, for someone to care, to come and to listen. I was that person. I showed up and they were encouraged, but then I was humbled because - I had been encouraged. On another occasion, I sat quietly with a family in the Lancaster General Hospital surgical waiting room. A loved one’s life hung in the balance of medical science, a surgeon’s hands, and God’s providence. I knew the situation was delicate and precarious. I struggled and agonized in mind for what seemed like hours, for the right things to say. I kept coming up short. Nothing. Nothing, nothing. Afterwards, they told me “what you said was sooooo helpful!” I was flabbergasted. I simply marveled at the
tremendous power of just showing up. Just showing up and being there. And you know what? God knows full well the power of showing up. After creating this big beautiful ball called earth, after creating you and me in his gorgeous image, he sent prophets, he sent priests, and he sent kings to show up; to love and lead his people. He showed up in so many ways at so many times..... but we didn’t get it. We didn’t get it and we didn’t respond. Finally, he came himself... as a man. God showed up. God showed up, full of grace and truth, in his Son Jesus Christ. Not only that but God showed up to personally show us how to live, how to love, how to give and how to serve. And the final reason he showed up was to provide a way for us to live with him forever. God showed up to take away our guilt, brokenness, and shame, simply by faith in his name.... and his name is Jesus. So, my friends, encouragement comes in two words – show up. Show up. So now you know what you
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need to do this week to have an encouraging week!
Encouraged by Shifting Gears

Lisa and I thrive on our morning bike ride. We really come alive. I bet you know this by now. It’s simply the perfect way to start our day. We both have late model hybrid bikes with the standard 21 gears. This means there are two gear shifts. One on the right with settings from 1 to 7 and one on the left with settings from 1 to 3. It’s great to have that many options for gears, but I really only use about 4 or 5 on our rides. Now to shift gears, two actions are required. First, you move the gear shift lever and two, you must be pedaling. Both actions are required. The gears won’t shift if one of those actions is missing. It’s a both/and situation. Now, hold onto that thought for a moment, it speaks volumes about life. When I was in the East Petersburg Elementary School, we had workbooks called, “Think and Do.” Think AND Do. Fascinating, right? Are you old enough to remember them? We were taught
at this early age that two things are necessary. Thinking AND doing. Simply thinking, as vital as that is, is not enough. You also must DO. You must perform, do something. See, you could be one of the world’s top geniuses, with superior intellectual thinking skills, with a 200 IQ, but if you don’t apply it and do something, it’s worthless. In the same way, if you run off like an unguided missile, doing, doing, doing, without thinking, well, it’s also worthless and chaotic. It’s another both/and.

When I was flying C-130 aircraft for the Delaware Air National Guard, we were instructed to fly these large airplanes using a certain maximizing engine temperature to help the engines last as long as possible, to save you hardworking taxpayers money. Now, if you’d be ridiculous and take this thinking to an extreme, you could make these engines last indefinitely if you never fired them up. But, think about it, the engines would last forever, but you’d never go anywhere, you’d never do anything, you’
never get the mission accomplished. It had to be both/and. Well, this same “both/and” concept applies to our faith. James, the half-brother of Jesus, writes this, “Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action is dead.” Do you see it? It’s another both/and. It’s faith AND action. It’s thinking AND doing. It’s pedaling AND shifting. So, with that background, our encouragement today is found in “finding a niche” AND filling it. Recognizing your gift AND using it. Placing your faith in God, in God’s Son AND responding as God’s Spirit leads. It’s both/and. Pretty simple really. Both/ands are vital to your life. With that, my friends, have an encouraging week as you pedal through life AND shift your gears.
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Encouraged by Helpers

Are you ready for encouragement? If so, consider with me how many helpers you have! That’s right. Simple task. How many helpers you have. At the end I’ll ask you to make a list. You see, it just dawned on me that I’m super encouraged by dozens of helpers, crutches for my condition in life, and I just know – if you’d think about it with me – you’d be encouraged too. Let me explain. I’m only able to read emails, books, labels, news, texts, God’s Word, signs and billboards when I wear my glasses. My glasses are marvelous little helpers that bring the world into sharp clear focus. And, I’m only able to hear my kids, grandkids, wife, TV and music clearly when I have my hearing aids turned up. What wonderful little helpers that bless me with clarity. You see, without these little helpers, life for me would be a blurry, inaudible mess. I’m super encouraged by my helpers! In fact, hey,
when I need a cane, a walker, or a scooter, bring it on, I’ll take all the encouragement I can get. Do you see what I mean by helpers? Now, let’s think together how many other helpers we’re encouraged by. My 2018 Prius Prime encourages me and helps me in amazing ways. It has that cool dynamic cruise control feature, so it doesn’t let me crash into the truck in front of me. It just follows along at a safe distance. And, in parallel parking situations, I just press the button and let it park itself. Yup, I’m encouraged by that, cause I’m a crappy parallel parker. Oh, and my iPhone encourages me too. I only use a fraction of its power as I check emails, weather, news, Facebook, messages from grandkids, my calendar, to do list, driving directions, workout stats, TV shows, YouTube videos, music and of course, podcasts. Not to mention the encouraging invisible helper – SIRI. Like having my own personal assistant to set reminders, alarms, make phone calls and get
directions. I think – are you kidding me? All this encouragement and help stored in my pocket? That’s crazy. So, I’m encouraged by my helpers – they make life a lot easier for me. In fact, as I sit here, with my feet on my desk, I asked Alexa to play Gabriel’s Oboe radio from my Pandora account and beautiful music filled my ears.... Through hearing aids, of course. Then when I got a little warm, I asked Alexa to turn on my overhead fan and cool air settled over me. All I do is speak the word and Alexa encourages me and helps me. I hope you’re thinking of the many helpers that encourage you. Oh, but listen, I have another helper who makes my life SUPER blessed. This helper is a gift from God. God knows me so so well and looked at me 50 years ago and said, “You really need help. I mean really.” Then God searched all over and said, “I have just the right gift for you.” You see, in Genesis 2, right after God made the world and man, he said, “It is not good for the man
to be alone. I’ll make a helper suitable for him.” I think he had me in mind at the time. So, 47 years ago, God blessed me with my wife Lisa. She’s strong, hardworking, super intelligent, beautiful and a perfect helper for me. Now, I should tell you how, but I don’t have enough heartbeats left to recount all the help she’s been for me, the family and friends. She’s just the epitome of a help mate and that is super encouraging. Soooo, my friends, your assignment this week, if you want encouragement, is to make a list of all the helpers you have...... then have a super encouraging and grateful week!
Encouraged by Variety

Today, I’m encouraged by variety. Yea, just one word, variety. It started out, no surprise, if you listen to my podcasts, on the Northwest Lancaster County river trail, as I pedaled along and noticed the huge variety of colors of foliage. All those beautiful shades of green and even the plethora of shades of brown on the trees and tree stumps. From there, again, no surprise, my mind went wild, with a variety of thoughts about variety. My first thought was about a visit we made to the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C. where I was flabbergasted at a display of beetles. The placard said, and I verified it, “300 million years ago there were 5 families of beetles.” Today there are over 350,000 and some websites say over 400,000. That, my friends, is variety on steroids. That is radical diversity. Variety is encouraging, interesting, maybe overwhelming, but a ginormous, generous gift from God. Then,
of course, there’s at least 1761 TV channels in the U.S., over 12,000 career choices, and over 134,021,533 unique book titles in the world. I didn’t even check the variety of songs, movies or podcasts, but there’s a HUGE variety. In the year 2019, in just one year, 370,434 patents were filed in the U.S. Patent Office. Variety, variety, variety. Innovation, innovation, innovation. Variety is Soooo encouraging, so inviting, so invigorating. And, do you want another number? Wikipedia guestimates the world population in March 2020 at just over 7.8 billion. If I did the math correctly, if you could meet a new person every second, it would take you 247 years to meet everyone. Think of all that variety. All God’s children, all unique, all beautiful, all made in God’s image and all worthy of love. Do you see why variety encourages me? Now that you think about it, doesn’t variety encourage you, too? So, here’s the challenge, here’s the takeaway. Today, right now, this moment,
you can think new thoughts, make new choices, pursue new goals, explore new frontiers, invent new services, expand your capabilities, start new conversations, reinvent yourself and experiment with new ways of loving, learning, listening and leading. Are you encouraged yet? Variety will do that. So, dear friends, start creating more variety and encourage other to do the same....... Before the beetles completely take over. Have an encouraging week in your own unique way.
Encouraged by a Letter

I just received a handwritten letter from a friend. Yea, a handwritten letter. How often does that happen? So, it made me curious. It piqued my curiosity because this friend is super tech savvy and we’ve always emailed. Also, when I get a handwritten note, someone wants me to vote a certain way or make some sort of contribution. So, it seemed rather unusual to receive a handwritten letter from this friend. But on the other side of this issue; ‘I love handwritten letters.’ It shows the care involved, the time and attention required and of course, there’s the .55-cent investment in the U.S. postal service for delivery. So, I opened it and started to read. At first it was a great catching up with the family, you know, homeschooling and restaurant experiences associated with the Covid-19 lockdown, but then, ah, then,... there it was! There was the reason for the handwritten note. The reason
he took the time with a pen.... He had plunged into the deep end of study and research into the field of fountain pens, ink and even writing paper. Now this resonated with me and encouraged me in an uplifting way. He was writing with a beautiful blue/red ink with a sheen to it, called, Organic Studio Nitrogen ink. It was simply beautiful. It was even magical. You tilt the page and enjoy the sheening show. So, let me explain my giddy reaction. For the last bunch of years and I can’t remember how many, I’ve been fascinated with fountain pens. I’ve been writing with them and collecting them. I’ve been using them with various colors of ink to journal, think, doodle and write podcasts. I regularly use eleven fountain pens and less regularly use three. I love the various pens, their nibs and colors as I journal in five separate journals, each used for separate subjects. So, here’s the encouragement for today and it’s no big surprise – no huge new revelation. We’re encouraged when we
share interests with others. We’re lifted, encouraged, energized and delighted when we have engaging conversation partners around our passions. It’s precisely why Facebook groups, book clubs, bowling leagues, sewing circles, coin collectors, motorcycle clubs, hot rod enthusiasts, and gun collectors flock together. It’s encouraging. It’s encouraging sharing our unique interests. So, let me give you one more observation that flowed out of this encouragement. Almighty God, our holy, loving, sovereign creator shares all our interests. The Almighty cares deeply about every aspect of our lives. Yea, our Heavenly Father not only shares our interests, but desperately wants to be our number one conversation partner. So, for this reason, he did at least two things. First, he came to earth as Jesus Christ to relate closely to us in every way, to share in our humanity, to share his over-the-top love, to show us how to love, to show us how to serve, to show us how to lead
and to show us how to be present for one another. Yea, God came to earth as Jesus Christ to show us that He relates to our struggles, our desires and our hills and valleys of life. And second, God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to teach us to pray, to show us how to relate intimately with our Heavenly Father. Jesus came to relate to us, converse with us and show us that Our Heavenly Father wants to be our number one relationship, our number one conversation partner, our chief encourager. So, friends, encouragement today comes by spending time with our conversation partners, making sure God is number one. Oh, and this podcast was written with a Mont Blanc Boheme retractable fountain pen with Charoite ink. Have an encouraging week.
Encouraged by a Theory

I don’t know where this encouraging thought came from, I really don’t. Maybe from the cracks and crevices of my brain, and I’m sure there are many. Maybe it was just another gift from God, who loves to lavish kindness, creativity, and random ideas on me. Well, wherever it came from, thank you. Here it is. It’s simple but powerful. I’m encouraged today by the theory of constraints. Yea, the theory of constraints. Those in the know, the practitioners call it TOC. TOC was made famous in 1984 with Eli Goldratt’s book, The Goal. And, if you haven’t read it, you should. It’s an easy read and it will encourage you. You see, the theory of constraints will give you a whole new lens to view life, work, hobbies, processes and whatever you do. You’ll have a new encouraging perspective. Let me help you understand why. In any system, whether it’s a manufacturing process, a sales force,
mowing your grass writing a book, building a house or growing a garden, you are always limited by a constraint. You are limited by a funnel hole, a weak link, a restriction, or a blockage. There is always a main factor, a main actor, a main process that holds you back. And you will never grow or improve or excel faster than your main limiting factor. Let me give you some examples. If you’re taking the family on a hike up a mountain, your top speed to the astounding view is based on your slowest family member. If you’re mowing your grass, the time it takes for this task in the baking sun is limited either by your mower speed or the size of your mowing deck. If you’re building a house or manufacturing a widget, you’re constrained by your slowest subcontractor or you’re limited by your slowest manufacturing subprocess. So, here’s why TOC is so encouraging. In order to improve any system..... your main job is to identify your main bottleneck, your chief constraint. Once
you do that, there is no more important work other than eliminating this constraint. It doesn’t matter what else you do organizationally, cosmetically, supply chain wise, or whatever. If you’re not unblocking the funnel, strengthening your weakest link, it will never ever get better. Isn’t that cool to know? Isn’t that encouraging? Gives you a whole new set of eyes to see your conundrums. Think, search, ask, ponder, and seek out your chief constraint and then go to work on it, eliminating it or increasing the capacity. Do that and be encouraged. Oh, one more thing. I almost forgot to tell you. As soon as you eliminate your main constraint, another one will rear its ugly head. But now, you know what to do. So, have an encouraging week with TOC.
Encouraged by Attention

Yesterday I spent an hour and half mucking around our pond less waterfall trying to solve a water leak. I toted back breaking stones out of it and slopped around pulling on the thick rubber liner to keep it from leaking. Not an easy task on my 66 ½ year old back in 88-degree sunshine with high humidity. Then I measured the water level and monitored it for 4 hours. It didn’t seem to be leaking. I was delighted. So, went to bed with heavy rain forecast overnight. This morning I went out to see the level, expecting it to be up slightly from the overnight rain. But noooooo. It was down a quarter to half an inch. What? How could this be? Must still have a leak. Now I’m bummed out. So, I tell you this to point to the word, attention. Attention. You see, all I could think about for the first 20 minutes of our 10-mile river trail bike ride was the back-breaking work on the waterfall that didn’t stop the leak. My
attention was on the hard sweaty, muddy work that obviously failed. My attention was slanted, skewed, negative, disappointed, depressed, and focused on the leak. And, in this depressing tunnel of attention, I know I missed some of the beauty of the bike ride. I bounced over some sticks I hadn’t noticed, probably missed some scurrying squirrels, glistening spider webs, and rays of sunshine through the trees. All because my attention was dire, down, defeated, and deflated. Leaking like my waterfall. So, providentially, God knocked on my cycle helmet or blew the wind of his Spirit into me and showed me how my attention affected my day. God made me realize how powerful attention can be. In fact, when I was snapped out of my atrophied attention, I noticed how I was tense in my neck and shoulders. When I noticed this, when my attention was on my tense body parts, I could relax, ‘de-tensify,’ and breathe easier. When I was in control of my attention, I was happier, less anxious, and
quite encouraged. I noticed the baby bunnies ducking for cover as we pedaled by and I noticed the brilliant Indigo bunting showing off her colors. Do I have your attention yet? So, my friends, as simple or as hard as this sounds, encouragement comes through active POSITIVE attention. Active, positive attention. Are you listening? Are you paying attention? So now I must ask. Where’s your attention? Are you attending to your problems, your leaks, your gaps, your foibles, your tensions, your losses, or your heartaches? Or are you attending to hope, solutions, possibilities, next steps, or even the absolute beauty right outside your window? As I write this, I’m attending to my choice of words and the beautiful hydrangeas outside my office window. They are bright, pink, wide open and happy after the overnight rain. For yesterday, Lisa brought my attention to how shriveled and droopy they were, showing their disgust for the brutal heat. Oh, and I did put more water in the waterfall. I’ll muck
around it more in a couple of days to find the leak. But right now, I thank the Lord for bringing my attention to my attention and giving me encouragement. My hope is that I brought your attention to your attention and through this, you’ll be encouraged. Have an encouraging week!
Encouraged by What Happened Next

Today’s encouragement comes from “what happened next.” Simple but powerful, what happened next. Let me tell you a brief story to set the stage. When I was in high school, I would gaze into the sky and watch contrails of jets going by. I dreamed of someday flying these big guys. So, before college, I took the Air Force Officers Qualifying Test (the AFOQT) and scored just well enough to qualify for Air Force pilot training. Looked like my career path was set and on track. But then, shortly after graduation from college, the Air Force cut the number of pilots and told me I couldn’t attend pilot training. My dreams were dashed. My life’s story could have ended there..... but what happened next? I entered the Air Force and kept applying for pilot training and kept getting rejected. My life’s dreams could have ended there, but what happened next? I applied for pilot training with the Delaware Air National
Guard. They liked me well enough but said my AFOQT scores were not good enough for their selection process. Again, my dreams of flying airplanes could have stopped right there..... but what happened next? I retook the AFOQT test and scored extremely well. With these new scores, they accepted me into their program and sent me off to pilot training. I had a fulfilling 20-year military career, flying C-130s all over the world. So I tell you that story (and I have others like it) to say this: When we look at our life’s tragedies, our failures, our foibles, our accidents, our mess-ups, our screwups and even our sins, we stop telling our story too soon. We end the story in the hospital, in prison, in the court system, in the gutter or in depression. We end the story before the ‘what happened next.’ You may be stuck there right now. You may have ended your story. But my word to you today, is, be of good cheer. Encouragement comes in a package that I call, “what happened next?”
What happened next? Have you opened that package lately? It’s on your doorstep. You see, since God made us eternal beings, so there’s always a “next.” Always. You may not be there just now, but there IS a next and it’s on it’s way. In the New Testament, there’s a story of close friends of Jesus – Mary, Martha and their brother Lazarus. Lazarus dies is buried, and a large rock was placed over his tomb. His sisters were devastated, even distraught with their loss. But that’s not the end of the story. So, ask me, “Charlie, what happened next?” Ok, I’ll tell you. They sent word to Jesus. They told Jesus their plight. Jesus came a few days later, took them to the tomb and told them to roll the large rock away. Then he called with a loud voice, “Lazarus come out.” Jesus raised Lazarus to new life, told them to take off the grave clothes. He didn’t need them. That’s what happened next. Do you see what the sisters did? They took their plea to Jesus and then were astounded at what happened
next. Friends, there’s always, always, always a “next.” So, your encouragement today comes by looking at your current situation and instead of ruminating or wringing your hands in angst and depression..... tell Jesus all about it and then look forward to “what wonderful turn of events will happen next.” There’s always a “next.” So, now or next, go have an encouraging week.
Encouraged by a Prayer

Things aren’t the way they seem. Ever heard that? Things aren’t the way they appear. What? Sounds crazy. To a rational, logical, scientific, “seeing is believing” person, that statement is ludicrous and absurd. Of course, things are the way they seem, the way they appear. How could it be otherwise? But, if we drill down a bit and dig beneath the surface, we can uncover a greater truth. So, let’s drill and dig a little. In a Facebook post yesterday, there was a story of an older farmer offering a prayer for breakfast. It raised a bunch of eyebrows because it went something like this: Dear Lord, I hate buttermilk. And Lord, I hate lard. And, Lord, you know how I hate raw white flour. But, Lord when you mix them all together and bake them, I do love warm, fresh from the oven biscuits. So, Lord, when things come up that don’t like, when life gets hard, when we just don’t understand what you’re
saying to us, help us to just relax and wait until you’re done mixing and baking. It will probably be far better than fresh, warm biscuits. Amen. So, you see, when we’re encouraged by an unflagging faith in God’s sovereign, mixing methodology, in God’s presence, peace, power and promise of life abundant, then truly things aren’t really what they seem. They’re right now in the murky, malaise of God’s mixing bowl. They’re being chopped, stirred, pureed and baked for our blessed good. So, let me check in with you. Did you hear the word of encouragement? Did you hear the encouragement in the middle of the prayer? Relax. Relax. Relax in God’s kitchen. Yea relax – even if the oven temperature is 450 degrees and you’re in the first of 15 minutes of baking. Relax and anticipate those heavenly smells and the sweet taste of God’s goodness and grace. Imagine the mouth-watering feast that’s coming soon, probably more like a Cinnabon or apple fritter donut with gobs of sugary
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glaze. So, dear friends, relax in God’s kitchen and have an encouraging week.
Encouraged by Barnabus

I don’t know if you picked up on it yet, but most of my encouragement comes from God’s wonderful word. Oh, and God’s inspiration while riding the Northwest Lancaster County River Trail, God’s Holy Spirit and God’s creation. Yea, you can boil all down to God’s awesome goodness! So, today’s encouragement comes straight out of God’s Word. I spend time in God’s Word every morning as I methodically read through the Old Testament and the New Testament once a year. I lost track of the number of years, but it doesn’t matter as something new jumps out nearly every day. God’s word is fresh and new and alive and soooo encouraging. Anyway, today I was in the New Testament book of Acts, chapter 15. The Apostle Paul and Barnabus were in Antioch encouraging the believers. Paul then had the idea to return to the towns they had visited and check in on the believers.
Barnabus was happy to do that as well but wanted to take along Mark. Here’s what happened. Paul didn’t think it was wise because Mark had deserted the apostles in Pamphylia and didn’t continue in the work. This caused such a sharp disagreement that Paul and Barnabus parted company. They went their separate ways. Barnabus took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, while Paul took Silas and went through Syria and Cilicia. So, let me tell you why this is encouraging to me. Barnabus was a Levite from Cyprus, whose name means “son of encouragement.” And, his name was fitting, as he had the gift of encouragement. In this case, he did not give up on Mark. He gave Mark another chance. Barnabus was there for Mark, side by side, mentoring him, molding him and forgiving him. I don’t know how many strikes Mark had against him, but Barnabus forgave him and wanted to be with him. And this is so encouraging because it reminds me of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who no matter...
the number of our strikes, strikeouts and failures, continues to reach out his bloody forgiving hand, simply encouraging us to accept it. So, friends I hope Barnabus, the son of encouragement, encourages you to give others a chance, forgive others and walk with others in a healthy, encouraging way. Bless you and have an encouraging week.
Encouraged by One Decision

As I look back over the last five days, I’m encouraged by one simple decision. Let me give you the whole background and then tell you about that encouraging decision. It was Thursday, July 3rd, another beautiful day on the Northwest Lancaster County River Trail. Lisa and I had ridden 9 of 10 miles. I was following Lisa and we were maintaining our typical trail speed of about 11.2 miles per hour. As we turned a corner on the last mile, I heard Lisa let out a blood-curdling scream. I locked up my brakes and within a split second went over my handlebars and did an agonizing face plant on the asphalt trail. Lisa had spotted a large black snake on the trail. Well, I was able to pull myself up with a face full of dripping blood. I had a large gash above my left eye, a nose and lip full of blood, abrasions on my knuckles, left arm and left knee. I held a hanky over my face as best I could as we started walking.
toward the car. I then decided it would take forever to walk this last mile, so I hopped back on the bike, one hand on the handlebar and the other stopping blood. A couple of trail angels came along, offered their tissues and drinking water to wash off blood, rode with us back to the car and helped us load the bikes. Lisa drove as I held hankies and tissues over my wounds. First, we went to the local urgent care. They did a quick triage of the wounds and sent me on to the emergency room for a CT scan of my head, x-rays for my hands and nine stitches. We came home for some rest, some ice, some ibuprofen, some Tylenol and to pack for our 4-day weekend to Seneca Lake. You see, Jeff and Taryn had invited us on this trip to celebrate my retirement. I was not going to miss it! So, Lisa drove – I’m super grateful for that, and we had a wonderful time, hiking, swimming (I didn’t get my stitches wet), kayaking, playing bocce ball, playing cars on the floor with Jacob, chilling by the lake as
“cool guys,” watching a full display of fireworks around the lake, and capping it off with some celebratory sparklers. It was an amazing and life-giving weekend. So, here’s the encouraging decision. “keep on going.”

Keep on going. As I look back over the last five days, the one encouraging decision I made was to keep on going. Keep going on the bike, keep going from urgent care to ER, keep going to Seneca Lake, keep going hiking, keep going kayaking, keep going with the loving, support of my family. So, let me encourage you today, in whatever situation you’re dealing with, .... keep on going. You might be facing this decision today or you might be facing it tomorrow. Do you quit, give up, fold, hang it up, throw in the towel, say, it’s no use? Or do you keep on going...... keep on going, no matter what?

As you think about this decision for your life, I have one more encouraging decision, to share. In my journey through life, I made a
life-changing decision. That decision was to trust, love, and follow Jesus Christ – the Son of God, the Savior of the world; the one and only true God who came to earth, to love unconditionally, to serve humanity and to die in our place. I made this one decision to place my faith in the one true God who offers us abundant life and eternal life, all from one encouraging decision. So, friends, let me encourage you to keep on going and have a decisively encouraging week.
Encouraged by the Eternal Now

I’m encouraged today by God’s continual presence for me in the eternal now. The eternal now. Have you heard that term before? Eternal now. Think about it. There is no other time. Can you relive yesterday or last year? Can you return to that magical moment at Ocean City or Seneca Lake, or the Oktoberfest or your best cruise ever? Noooo. The past is gone. Can you fast forward life to next year, your graduation, your next assignment, your retirement or your exciting bucket-list trip? Nooo. The future will only come to you as, well, “now.” The future will only come to you after you take many breaths and experience even more heartbeats. Oh sure, you can smile or fret about your past and you can dream about your future. You can look at your photos, your videos, your journals, and your scrap books and smell the smells and enjoy the memories. And, you can right now, make
plans for your graduation, your next assignment, your retirement, or your bucket list trip, but guess what? You can only do it NOW – in this moment – in your eternal now. So, I know this is cliché, but I think it’s why “now” is called the present. The present. Because that’s exactly what it is – a present for you from God. Right now – the eternal now – is a huge present, a gift. When we open our eyes in the morning – we should be like kids on Christmas day – wild-eyed, excited, and expectant for the presents under the tree. Each day is a present to be unwrapped, prayerfully, and carefully with eager anticipation. What might this present bring? Thank you, Lord, for yet another present. I have a quirk I’ll tell you about. I hate to hear people testing a microphone or sound system with “testing one two three, testing, testing, testing, test one two three, test, test.” What a waste of words. Not helpful or encouraging at all. I test microphones and sound systems with these words, “This is the
day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.” These words do the same job but toss an eternal truth into the air while testing the sound system. Friends, that’s the truth about the eternal now. We only live and breathe and have our being in the eternal now. Right now. Right now. And right now. In Deuteronomy 31 and Hebrews 13, God tells us, “I will never leave you or forsake you.” I will never leave you or forsake you. Friends, do you realize it? As we live in the eternal now – the present – the present/presence of God is with us now and now and now and .... Always will be. The Lord our God is with us now, always will be and is encouraging us to live vibrantly, lovingly, productively right now. So, be encouraged my friends – right now – for there really isn’t any other time. Have an encouraging week in the eternal now.
Encouraged by Words

Today I’m encouraged by words. Yea, words. Just words. I even need words to think about words. Words can be very encouraging, and I don’t know about you, but I love, love, love encouraging words. You could bring me buckets of encouraging words. You could open a fire hydrant of encouraging words on me. If a tsunami of encouraging words were coming, I’d head straight to the beach. I thrive on encouraging words. I thrive on words like, way to go! You’re a superhero. You’re so helpful. That was a delicious meal. Thank you for the well-planned trip. You did a great job. You’ve done a phenomenal job. You’re the absolute best. I appreciate your efforts. You really make me look good. You can do it I just know it. I have full confidence in you and your talents and abilities. I love how you jumped in and took more responsibility. You make my job a delight and far easier. You
look radiant today. I love your new hair style. I love your huge smile. You’ve gone above and beyond. You’ve literally made my day. Thank you. You get the point. And, since you’re a quick study, you’re probably on the verge of using some of these words in your own world. You see, we all respond joyfully and eagerly to words that encourage and build up. Encouraging words have a melodious sound in our ears. They rewire our brains, make us happy, giddy, joyful, and even more responsive. Encouraging words put a spring in our step and a gallop in our gait. They’re like an extra dip of soft serve ice cream with sprinkles on top. They’re like a Swedish fish gelati. Encouraging words are like a spoonful of honey, they’re empowering like electricity, they’re eye opening like espresso. They reward, produce energy, create hope, help us lean into the gale force winds in the world. They make us row harder. And they give us relentless resilience, strength, and stamina. Yea, that’s what
encouraging words do. So, friends, if you enjoy encouraging words, like I do, if you get a “high” from life-giving, positive words, if you’re supercharged by words, then you know full well others are too. We’re not alone. Oh, one more thing. God gave me the gift of encouragement, but I’d drain like a lithium battery or run down like a cell phone at 20% power, with that low power warning if I didn’t plug-in daily to the charger. I need a daily recharging. And the charger that powers me up is God’s Word. God’s Word is like a level 2 charger or for Tesla drivers, a super charger. I need that bolt of electricity on my panel and the 100% indicator in the green light. So, I plug in daily and hear God’s Spirit telling me how loved I am, how precious I am, how valuable I am, how beautiful I am - made in God’s image, and how God is always wooing me, pursuing me, loving me, reaching for me, protecting me and even sacrificing for me. Yea, I’m powered up and encouraged by God’s
encouraging words to live in hope, to live with no fear, to live with faith, and to live with the promise of a radical, abundant and eternal life. So, for me, all of God’s Word is encouraging, but it says in 1 Thessalonians 5:11, “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” With those words, and the words unique to you, have an exciting, energizing and encouraging week.
Encouraged by Habits

I’m encouraged by habits. Yea, I’m encouraged today by habits and I hope to encourage you too in your habits. I have a set of pretty healthy habits that seem to work for me. Now, I may have a bit of an advantage, because I’ve always been a neurotic, focused, “responsibility addict,” – you know, worrying about ‘messing up,’ disappointing others, missing something or not following through. Neurotic sums it up. (you see neurotics ALWAYS take responsibility where those with character disorders, NEVER take responsibility, nothing is their fault – but I digress) So, today, I’m super encouraged by a set of healthy habits that have worked well for me – sort of like a healthy checklist for life. I’ll tell you about a few of them in a minute, but just today I discovered from Healthline.com that it takes 18 – 254 days to form a new habit. And, it takes an average of 66 days for a new
behavior to become automatic. The length of time it takes to establish a new habit depends on the habit and the person. Now, I don’t know about you, but I’ve always believed that 21-day thing for a new habit, put out by Dr. Maxwell Maltz in his 1960 book, Psycho-Cybernetics. So, today I learned that this wisdom was debunked in a 2009 study published by the European Journal of Social Psychology. Well, this may be more than you need to know, or maybe knowing this WILL encourage you. Habits can take a while to root and grow. So, suffice it to say – I’m encouraged and blessed by my neurotic-ness and set of healthy habits. Some of my personal healthy habits include: 8 hours of sleep, 30 minutes of aerobic exercise, along with 50 pushups, and 2 minutes of planking 4 days a week, plenty of glasses of water during the day (as I take a sip), daily time in God’s word (I read through the whole Bible once a year), prayer time for my family and friends and of course, journaling. I’m a neurotic,
habitual ‘journaler’ and am right now, writing this podcast in a journal. Oh, and I’m writing this after writing a prayer in my prayer journal, a page of thanks in my gratitude journal, a page of Bible notes in my Bible reflections journal and updating my new bullet journal. Yea, I know, I know I’m neurotic and a little touched, but these habits work for me. Oh, I have many many more habits, like responding to emails promptly, responding to phone calls promptly, saving a bit of money each month, giving 10% of my income to the church (it’s called tithing), and handwriting thank you notes, just to mention a few. You see, my habits make me and shape me. And, if you’re willing to stop just for a moment and think about your life, examine your routines, you’ll discover this - your habits shape you and make you. So, friends, you know what I’m about to ask; I bet you can feel it…. The only remaining question is……. Wait for it....... Do you like your shape and make? Are your habits
improving your life, making you healthier, happier, richer, wiser, and more loving, or not so much? With that, have an
encouraging week as you start day 1 of 18 – 254 days forming a new healthy habit. I know you can do it.
Encouraged by the Platinum Rule

Today my encouragement comes from the Platinum Rule. Yea, the platinum rule. Now, I know you’ve heard of the golden rule but not sure about the platinum rule. Your mom, your grandma or your late uncle Jack probably sat you down as a youngster and explained the golden rule. You know, the one that says, “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” It may have been thrown in as a disciplinary measure if you ripped off your sister or punched your brother or it may have just been part of your Sunday School upbringing. Either way, I know you’ve heard it before. And, I have to tell you, if you apply it correctly, if you don’t misinterpret it, it’s quite ancient, historically sound advice. You see it actually dates back about 2500 years. For over 2000 years ago, the greatest teacher who ever lived, Jesus, was quoted saying, “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this
sums up the Law and the Prophets.” But Jesus was drawing from the Hebrew scriptures written about 500 years before his time. He was quoting Leviticus 19:18, “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.” So, truly, I’ll say it again, if you apply this correctly and don’t misinterpret it, it’s outstanding life guidance. But here’s the problem. I’ve misinterpreted this golden rule, I’ve seen others misinterpret it and just maybe, you have too. Let me tell you how and then I’ll explain why I’m encouraged by the platinum rule. I’ve interpreted this rule way too narrowly when trying to buy gifts for others. For example, I have an affinity for pens. I collect pens, I love the feel of pens and I love to try out different pens. So, I’ve already purchased nice pen and pencil sets as gifts. I was thinking “buy for others what you’d like others to buy for you.” Makes sense, right? Well, not exactly. I’ve also
seen organizations give plaques, certificates, books and other elaborate rewards, when the recipient really would rather have cash, a gift card or perhaps additional paid time off to be with family. Here’s another example. If you like compliments and praise, you might lavish those on others, who would much rather have quiet time and extra space. One final caring example. If you love to have others praying for you in your special needs, this might lead you to freely share personal information about others, that violates their privacy. Just another way that the golden rule gets misinterpreted. Sooooo my friends, with that background, let me tell you why the platinum rule encourages me. The Platinum Rule says this, “Do unto others as they would like done unto them.” Do unto others as they would like done unto them. This nails it. This takes the wiggle room out. This takes ME out of it. The platinum rule was introduced in a 1996 book by Tony Alessandro and Michael O’Connor and it
clarifies the golden rule. So, for me it means discovering what gifts OTHERS would like rather than buying them what I like. Or discover rewards that are meaningful and appropriate for others, before wasting time and money. Or discover how others work best before leading, bossing or providing feedback. Or, getting permission from others before sharing prayer needs with the wider community. Do you get the point? Do unto others what THEY would like done unto them, which is by far the best way to apply the 2500-year-old golden rule. With that, have an encouraging week.
Encouraged by Comments

If you’ve listened to my podcast, “Encouraged by One Decision,” you heard about my over-the-handlebars bike accident. I received a new wrinkle in my head, well, actually it’s a scar above my left eye that required nine stitches. So, the other night I’m having dinner with my son’s in-laws. They’re great people and we see each other often. At some point early in the meal, Paul looks at my new wrinkle, I mean scar and asks, “Did they recommend any scar crème for you?” Then he showed me his scar from his knee surgery and said that scar cream really helped hide it and make it blend in. “Well, no, they hadn’t mentioned it.” And even as those words were coming out, my neurotic brain was wondering if that advice was buried in those pages of post-care notes that I usually skim and throw in a file. Luckily, as I was immersed in these self-berating thoughts, my wife, Lisa piped up and
said, “Yea, I used that crème on my shoulder replacement scar. Look at how well it worked, you can barely see it.” Then after the demonstration, she said, “We have two tubes of the cream at home. I’ll get it out for you.” Now, friends, I tell you all of that – not for you to know about scar crème, that I hope you never need, but for us to think about the power of comments and the connections they make. You see, comments, both constructive and critical come our way all the time. And, I’d say, we’re shaped and molded, not only by the comments, but by the connections they make. You see without Paul’s comment, I wouldn’t have thought about the scar cream and without Paul’s comment, Lisa may not have thought about it either. This may seem like a trivial example, but our lives are literally stock full of comments and connections and threads of connections. Two weeks ago, I had a pop-up request to preach at a local church. I didn’t have a lot of time to prepare. I’m a
lectionary text preacher, so I told Lisa it was crunch time to prepare the sermon. Her comment came at just the right moment. I wasn’t connecting with the lectionary texts and didn’t have much time. She said, “I thought you prepared a sermon for them back in May, but you got cancelled because of Covid-19.” Wow! Brilliant. She was right. I looked back at it, instantly connected with the text, tweaked it and freshened it up – Voila! The Spirit was speaking to me! Her comment made the needed connection. I have tons more of these comments to connections stories, but just today, as I was attending a zoom meeting of the Lancaster Theological Seminary Alumni Council, I jokingly made a comment about being retired and doing nothing. Later in the meeting, Kristle Evans made the comment, “the seminary is eager to hear the stories and activities of their alumni.” Guess what.... Sometime after the meeting, in my slow plodding brain, the connection was made. I
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AM doing something. I am trying to use the gift of encouragement God gave me. So, my friends, for your encouragement, think about the comments, connections and threads that boosted you along life’s path. I know you can point them out! Then your task is to respond with grace and gratitude..... oh, and pass along your comments! You’ll never know how many encouraging connections they’ll make. So, comment, connect and have an encouraging week!
Encouraged by a Gift

I’m super encouraged because of a gift I received. In fact, I’m super encouraged because this gift is the greatest possible gift in the world. After receiving this gift, I really don’t need any more gifts. This gift tops every other gift I could possibly imagine or receive. Oh, don’t get me wrong, over the course of my life, I’ve received a tsunami of great gifts, a deluge of amazing gifts, like a beautiful wife, absolutely wonderful and talented kids and grandkids. I’ve received health, wealth, happiness, joy, contentedness, Celebrity Cruises and Mont Blanc pens, but this gift tops them all. You see, all my gifts came from God, the greatest gift giver ever, but this is the ultimate gift. I didn’t earn this gift. I didn’t deserve this gift. I didn’t work for this gift. I didn’t stand in line for this gift. I didn’t compete for this gift, no, none of that. As a matter of fact, I can’t even explain why I received this gift. It wasn’t my birth
date, my birthplace, my birth parents, or even my birth order. It wasn’t my circle of friends, my elementary school, high school, college or grad school. It didn’t even come from my profession, yet in flying military aircraft for 20 years, I did spend more time than most of you above 20,000 feet, closer to God, as they say. But it didn’t come from that either. So, you’re probably curious by now. You may be making those rolling motions with your hands, like, come on, Charlie, just say it. Get to the point. What’s this great gift? Ok, ok, ok, the greatest gift I ever received was the gift of faith. Faith. There, I said it. But let me try to explain. This super encouraging gift of faith is faith in the one and only God who created every visible and invisible thing. Faith in the one who is making all things new. Faith in the one true God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faith in the one who absolutely, positively assures me of an eternal, brilliant, glorious, outrageously positive future. Yea, that’s the gift. That’s
the gift that tops them all. That’s the gift that lasts, the gift that sustains, the gift that empowers and the gift that super encourages me. You see, with this gift of faith, as hard as I try to BE good, DO good, think good, speak good and pray good, I still just splash paint on my life’s canvas. I make straggly lines, runny blobs, ghoulish figures, and dark shadows everywhere. I spill the paint, drop the brush, and muddle in my mucky mess, but through it all, through faith, God turns it into a Mona Lisa, a Van Gogh, a Picasso, a Michelangelo or a Monet. That’s the gift of faith. That’s what God does. As hard as I run in this Olympic human race, my arms flail, my lungs burn, my knees buckle and my eyes blur, but through it all, through faith, God places me on the gold medal platform, and I bow my head for the cherished gold medal. Yea, I marvel in awe at what God has done, is doing and will do in my life. That’s the gift of faith. Do you see why this is the best gift ever? Oh, and friends, I SOOO
want you to have this gift, too. I do, I do, I do. I want you to be amazed, overwhelmed, overjoyed, and over filled with this gargantuan gift of faith. It will positively change your life! Will you ask for it? Will you just ask God for this great gift of faith? And then, in faith, expect to receive it. I have faith that you will! With that, have an encouraging, faith filled life!

Charles W. Gross, Jr.
Encouraged by Unconditional Love

I woke up thinking about unconditional love. Yea, something aroused me this morning at 5 am and my brain was thinking about unconditional love. It was such an encouraging thought that I got up. I was going to say I jumped out of bed, but that’s more of a cliché and not what I really did at almost 67. Anyway, let me tell you why this is soooo encouraging. Unconditional love is the love that God has for me and the love God has for you. What I mean is that while we were still sinners, still broken, flawed people, God loved us, God loves us and God will always love us...... unconditionally. And when I say unconditionally, I mean there are no conditions under which God will stop loving us. Think about that for a moment. God loves us without conditions. In other words, right now, God loves you whether you’re drunk or sober, whether you’re addicted, perverted, lusting, lazy or a
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convicted felon. God loves you right this minute even if you’re called a loser or a liar. And God loves you without conditions if you’re pretty and perfect, a model citizen, a scout, a Lions Club member or a Sunday School teacher. Isn’t that encouraging? Unconditional love is powerfully encouraging. And this kind of love is all over the scriptures. Splattered all over God’s holy and encouraging word. When Job lost his fortune, his family and even his health, he continued loving God without conditions. When Paul was beaten and thrown in prison, he continued to love God and sang songs of praise. When Jesus taught, he spoke about unconditional love like this: when asked to walk a mile, walk a second mile, when someone wants your shirt, give them your coat as well. Jesus taught us love isn’t just a ‘friends and family’ plan, but love is for enemies, too. Love unconditionally! And Jesus didn’t just talk about unconditional love, he showed unconditional love when he
was mocked, spit on, beaten, bloodied and hung on a cross. He said, “Father forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.” So, I’m encouraged by unconditional love and not only encouraged, but given eternal life through Christ’s unconditional love. So, listen, just as when Jesus washed his disciples’ feet and said, “you’ll be blessed if you do the same,” we’re to go and love .... Unconditionally. Love without conditions. Let me make this more concrete. Remember when you were in front of the minister and said, “for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health?” You were saying, I’ll love you unconditionally. We should have said: “I’ll love you when you gain weight. I’ll love you when you snore. I’ll love you when you have a headache every night. I’ll love you when you’re grumpy, grouchy or groggy. I’ll love you when you’re late and I’ll love you when you forget our date. I’ll love you when you buy beer rather than pay the trash bill. I’ll
love you when you max out our credit cards and I’ll even love you when you say, “you’re just like your mom.” That’s the love that “always protects, always trusts, always hopes and always perseveres. That’s the love that never fails.” That’s the love that encourages me, changes me, inspires me and that’s the love that will not only encourage and change you, but will fill you, ooze from you and radiate from you as you love one another, unconditionally! So, in the name of God who is unconditional love, have an encouraging, and radically loving week!
Encouraged by my New View

It’s been three and a half weeks since Lisa and I have ridden on the Northwest Lancaster County River Trail. It’s a long story but do you remember the last time we rode on the trail? I described it in the “One Decision” episode. Yea, you got it, the bike accident. Well, in the course of that accident, while doing my swan dive and face plant into the asphalt, I broke off my helmet’s rearview mirror. So today, I rode without that rearview device. This gives me a new view. And listen, I have to tell you.... I love my new view! I just love my new view. Let me tell you why. First, I have a grander and more glorious view of the vista before me. The view just opens up in a spectacular panoramic way. My new view is unobstructed. It’s not blocked by the dangling rearview mirror. Secondly, with my rearview mirror in place, I was constantly checking it. I was neurotically checking for
other riders who wanted to pass. But, from my constant glances, I acted more like I heard sirens and saw flashing lights from an emergency vehicle. Truth be told, I was highly distracted by peering into where I had been, rather than taking in the beautiful expanse before me. So, I love my new view. You’ll think I’m crazy, but it reminds me of my Air Force pilot training days. The lesson that comes to mind was in a T-38 supersonic training jet. We’re climbing out at about 300 miles per hour, which is 440 feet per second, or one and a half football fields every second. So as a good student, I’m doing what’s called, “clearing” for other aircraft. I’m swiveling my head from side to side looking for other aircraft. At this point, my instructor yells at me saying, “Gross, you do realize how fast we’re going, right? When you look for aircraft, search in a small cone directly in front of you. That’s the danger area and the area to scan. If you see an aircraft to our right or left, in a nanosecond, we’re past it.
Look forward, directly in front of you. So, here’s the real reason I love my new view. It reminds me that I can’t change my past. I shouldn’t get distracted by my past. Shouldn’t dwell on my past and shouldn’t worry about my past. As a believer in Jesus Christ, I can simply admit my mistakes, confess where I messed up, where I missed the mark, and then move boldly forward. By confessing my sins, being truthful, honest, and transparent before the Lord, Christ forgives me, cleans me, frees me, releases me, and sends me righteously into the big bright beautiful vista of His future. You see why I love my new view? My encouragement for you is to “take off” your rearview mirror, don’t get caught up looking at the past, simply admit your brokenness and need for Jesus and then gaze gladly, joyously and boldly at your grand and glorious new view. Have an amazing week with your new view.
Encouraged by Pictures on My Wall

Sometimes when I wake up in the morning, I simply lie still, look around, think, dream, ponder and let the sleep slowly ooze from my body. I slowly prepare for the day. Well, this morning in my prone position I saw two pictures above my dresser with new eyes. I paid attention to two pictures that have been there for years. One is a nicely framed rectangular picture from my daughter Angie. It’s chock full of a collage of adorable pictures of the two of us inside cutouts of large words that say, “I ‘heart’ You.” And the heart is a large one. Isn’t that sweet? It is so encouraging to be reminded of her love and to be reminded of our many wonderful, daddy-daughter times together. It’s encouraging to see this with new eyes. The other picture is from Daniella, one of our German foreign exchange students. It says this with flowery decorative letters, “The greatest gift I ever had, it came from God, I
call him dad.” Such a beautiful picture of encouragement. Yea, sheer visual encouragement. These two pictures hang there every day. They quietly, unassumingly project love, affection, and encouragement. And, every day, I face them as I retrieve socks, underwear, shorts, and a t-shirt from my dresser, but I don’t have the eyes to see. And, every night they hang there, beaming memories and encouragement as I rest my glasses and hearing aids on the dresser, but I don’t have the eyes to see. Friends, pictures are a great way to be encouraged, as we soak in snap shots to savor, snippets of life that radiate glorious times with friends and family. So, as I think about it, our challenge is to see these icons of encouragement with fresh new eyes, fresh new hearts, and freshly renewed spirits. Our challenge is to relive the memories, the moments, the emotions of encouragement and carry them with us on our journey. Oh, and some of us have another picture of encouragement on our
walls. An image that’s bittersweet. It’s a reminder that we’re loved with an everlasting, eternal, encouraging love. It’s an image of God’s love for us and it’s a picture of God, who will stop at absolutely nothing to love, love, love us and to give us hope, encouragement and life. You know the image, don’t you? It’s the image of the cross. Some use the cross with the suffering Lord Jesus, while others use the image of the empty cross, the resurrected Jesus. Either way, when you really look at it, when you see it with fresh new eyes, when you reflect on what God has done for you, when you look deep into the image of the cross and see the pain, the suffering, the agony and the love expressed for you, you melt away, you grow, you change, you become a whole new person. And this transformation happens through the grace, the love, the suffering, and the encouragement of our Lord Jesus Christ. So, look around my friends. Look around at your photos, pictures, images and
encouraging memories, and look at them with fresh new eyes. Look around and be encouraged, but look, too at the image of the cross of Christ. Look at it with fresh new eyes. Look deeply and carefully at that image, and then be transformed, renewed, and encouraged. You’ll then be all set to have an enormously encouraging week!
Encouraged by Music

As my brain awoke to greet the exciting, encouraging new day – Friday – the day in which we would spend with our grandson, Jacob all by himself, and treat him to his favorite rides at Dutch Wonderland, my brain was also scouring other topics of encouragement. It must be my favorite pastime. Bunches of encouraging fruit were ripe for the picking, so I plucked them carefully from the vine of my imagination and safely stored them in my basket for later. But the one that jumped out and seemed the ripest, the one I picked first was encouragement from music. I’m encouraged by music. Beautiful music, soothing music, classical music, Christian music, and, well, a whole range of musical genres lift my spirit, soothe my soul, and encourage me in ways that I just can’t explain. I don’t know about you, but I get a high from music and sometimes I get on a musical kick of a genre,
Encouraging Life!

an artist or a song, that will last for hours or weeks or even months. I remember one Friday night during my freshman year at Grove City College, I was sorely missing my girlfriend, Lisa, so I binge listened to a Moody Blues album for hours and hours. I needed some encouragement. Now, this binge listening also happens in my car at times, when I blast tenor arias, or Pavorotti singing O Sole Mio, or La Fille Du Regiment or Nessum Dorma or Mi Batte II Cor O Paradiso!! Oh my, I get excited! I get so lifted and so encouraged by his sheer genius, his strong tenor voice! I can’t explain it to you, but it resonates with my soul. Now days, when I’m working in my office in the morning, I tell Alexa to play “Classical Solo Piano Radio from Charles’ Pandora.” In the afternoon, I tell Alexa to play “Gabriel’s Oboe Radio.” Encouragement through music fills my office and blesses me. For special treats I’ll sit with my iPhone, tap on YouTube and watch Andre Rieu’s inspiring
rendition of Ennio Morricone’s Once Upon a Time in the West, with Carla Maffioletti as soprano. Absolutely amazing – absolutely breathtaking, inspiring, encouraging and exhilarating. So, what is it about music that lifts me and encourages me? It’s a real spiritual mystery. I’m sure even attempting an explanation will come up short, but as you know, that doesn’t stop me. Certain notes, rhythms, voices and sounds cause my cells, my synapses, my soul, and my whole attitude to do the happy dance. I just feel better. I feel more alive. I feel more in tune with God’s goodness, God’s mystery, and God’s love. That’s the best I can do. Oh, one other explanation is this: When I think about the composers, arrangers and artists using their God-given talents and God-given abilities to their fullest, that these artists are capitalizing on their gifts from God and applying their own extraordinary efforts to compliment these gifts, I’m lifted, inspired and encouraged. In other words, God has
tremendously gifted certain people with stellar musical abilities, but only when they apply their own herculean efforts, through years and years of lessons, and through hours upon thousands of hours of practice, does the music make such an encouraging ring in my soul. So, my friends, the challenge today is to put on your favorite musical piece, then dive into your own unique God-given abilities and encourage others with your efforts. It will make God smile, it will be a symphony for God’s people, and it will be music to my ears. Have an encouraging week.
Encouraged by Teachers

I woke up today with a unique encouragement. Today, I’m encouraged by teachers. That’s right, teachers. I am who I am because of the countless teachers in my life. You just may be one of them, and I’m so grateful. Think about it! You are who you are because of teachers, too. You and I have been shaped, molded, blessed, encouraged, coached, pastored, and loved by teachers. From day one we’ve been taught and instructed. From day one, we’ve had our hands held, we’ve been given life lessons, we’ve been given academic instruction and we’ve been given on-the-job training. From day one, we’ve been taught by parents or parent figures. In our early memories we’ve been taught by siblings and playmates. For instance, we’ve been taught not to take their toys… by being clobbered on the head or pushed head-over-heals. Yea, negative reinforcement is sometimes an effective
teaching tool. Experience is a great teacher, too. Experience often confirms the words of other teachers. Like, the lesson, “don’t touch the stove, it’s hot.” And when your teacher turns her back, what do you do? Touch the stove! YOWW! I might have learned that lesson. So, listen friends, I’ve had some time to think about my teachers. I’ve been encouraged by countless teachers in my life, teachers in elementary school, high school, coaches and pastors. I’ve been encouraged and taught by Grove City College, Webster University, Goldey Beacom College, and Lancaster Theological Seminary professors. I’ve been encouraged and taught by Air Force Pilot Training instructors, Delaware Air National Guard colleagues, Colonels and Generals. I have been absolutely surrounded by outstanding women and men who taught me thinking skills, practical skills, life skills, theological skills, pastoral skills, and relationship skills. And, friends, you have too. I’ve been taught, shaped, molded,
blessed and loved by teachers such as my friends, my children, my grandchildren, and my wife. Teachers have shaped me; teachers have shaped you and teachers have shaped the future. So, I’m encouraged by teachers. But, friends, listen. Do you know the teacher who made the biggest difference in my life? The teacher who changed my life from a downward spiral to a positive, upward trajectory? You know the name, the name above every name, the greatest teacher the world has ever known – You know his name. His name is Jesus! Jesus the Christ. Jesus, the Son of the Living God. Jesus is the teacher who taught about faith, hope and love. The teacher who not only taught through words but taught by example. The teacher who taught by doing the dirty work, stooping, serving as a slave, and washing dirty feet. The teacher who taught us what love is, what love does and what love looks like - to the fullest. So, yea, today, I’m encouraged by teachers. And in this moment of
encouragement, I wonder who I’m teaching, I wonder what I teach, and I wonder how my teaching affects the future. Will you join in me in this encouragement and celebration of teachers? Oh, today, take a moment to reflect on the teachers who have encouraged you and then reflect on your students and lesson plans. Have an encouraging week!
Encouraged by Honesty

Hey, I have a confession to make. I realized a few days ago I hadn’t been totally truthful, I hadn’t gotten it quite right. I don’t know how it happened, maybe a brain glitch, but I’ll take full responsibility and set the record straight. I want to be honest with you. In the episode titled, Encouraged by Pictures on My Wall, I told you that my beautiful, cherished collage picture from my daughter Angie said, “I heart You.” Well, it actually says, “I heart You, Dad,” which is far more personal and meaningful. I feel terrible that I got it wrong. Will you forgive me? I try to be honest, truthful, and correct, but sometimes, well, let’s be honest, lots of times, I fail. So, friends, now that I feel better, my encouragement for today comes from honesty. It comes from leaders, companies, organizations, and friends, who are truthful, honest, vulnerable, and transparent. I’m encouraged by people, leaders and
organizations who admit their mistakes and seek forgiveness and reconciliation. I’m encouraged by people who work hard to discover the truth, admit their errors and seek to be reconciled. It’s like breathing fresh spring mountain air. Back in April we ordered some cloth masks from an online company. Well, they were advertised as cloth masks, but when they arrived, we discovered they were cheap foam masks. It took a bit of back and forth negotiating, but eventually they admitted their error, their misleading advertising and returned our money. That’s encouraging. When I was the Chief of Safety for the Delaware Air National Guard, I along with some other top leaders of the organization had made some very unsafe flying decisions. We had inadvertently broken some rules that could have had devastating consequences. I decided to put us in front of the other crew members, admit our mistakes and use it as a safety lesson. To use a cliché, you could have heard a pin drop
in that auditorium. Friends, honesty, truth-telling, and transparency make leaders more authentic and more effective, not less. In today’s politically charged, social media driven culture, it seems that there are only two sides to every issue and the two sides are deeply dug in, deeply divided, deeply entrenched in warfare, rather than seeking, as Superman would say, ‘truth, justice and the American way.’” I, for one, would love to see us working together, honestly, truthfully, scientifically, transparently on initiatives, values and goals that are life-giving to all of God’s children; goals that would seek to unify us, encourage us, and make us a beacon of hope, shining the light of truth to the world. I think this may only be possible when we put down our swords, come out of our foxholes and become vulnerable, open, honest, and transparent to one another. Maybe it’s only possible when we become more Christ-like. Maybe it’s only possible when we are open to unconditionally loving
and forgiving our enemies who despise us. Maybe it’s only possible when we are open to unconditionally loving and forgiving our friends who abandon us. Maybe it’s only possible when we are open, honest, transparent and vulnerable enough to admit we may be wrong, to confess we may not have it completely right. And, you know what? I find it ironic that simply confessing our brokenness, confessing our faults, confessing our foibles, and confessing our failures before the Lord, is the first step in forming a beautiful, saving, life-giving relationship with Jesus Christ! With that, may you have an open, honest, transparent, and encouraging week!
Encouraged by Balance

Our encouragement today comes from balance, or probably more precisely, the pursuit of balance. When I look around, I see the beauty of balance everywhere! I see the balance of night and day. I see the balance of sunshine and rain. I see the balance of planting and harvesting. I see the balance of colors in nature. I see the balance of the seasons, hot and cold. And I see the balance of work and rest. Yea, if you take a look, you’ll see balance everywhere. Think about your car engine. You see the balance of the power stroke followed by a resting stroke. Think about your own heart. You see the balance of the heartbeat, that forces your blood around your body, followed by a brief rest. Think about workout regimens, that once upon a time were experienced in your local gym. There’s a balance of upper body workouts, followed by rest, then there’s a balance of lower body workouts, followed
by rest. There’s even a balance in your breathing – your inhales are balanced by your exhales. Oh, and what about your eating? The recommendation is for a balanced diet of fruits, vegetables, grains, and proteins. So, perhaps it’s simplistic, but today, I’m encouraged by balance or the pursuit of balance. Balancing my time, my energy, my service, my encouragement, my focus, and even my checkbook. But here’s the thing. Our lives can go out of balance in a myriad of ways. We can go out of balance in our work. We can go out of balance in our relationships. We can go out of balance in our health. We can go out of balance in our habits. We can go out of balance in our addictions, and the list could go on and on. Luckily, no, providentially, we have help and encouragement for our balance in God’s word. In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus is teaching to help us achieve balance. Listen to Jesus’ words. Come to me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my
yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” You see Jesus wants to balance our lives. Jesus wants to balance our loads by sharing our yoke and giving us rest. Christ’s earnest desire is for our life’s balance to include him. Christ earnestly wants us to worship him, love him, put our faith in him, put our trust in him, and become yoked to him. And look at this. Even God, the Father commands us to balance our lives with the first positively stated commandment in the ten commandments. Let me summarize the first four commandments from Exodus 20. The first three are, “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make a graven image, and you shall not misuse the name of the Lord. These are all, “shall nots” negatively worded. But the first positive one is this: remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. You may work six days but on the seventh day, you rest. Do you see it? God
builds into our lives the possibility for balance for our good, then sends Jesus to balance us. So, friends, I’m encouraged by balance, but most of all, I’m encouraged by the Lord Jesus Christ, who pursues me, pursues you and offers his easy yoke to balance us and give us rest. Let’s get yoked up with Jesus and have an encouraging week.
Encouraged by “As If It’s Your Last”

I had a wild thought while shaving this morning. This wild thought was not only encouraging, but potentially life-changing, life-altering. What is it about those brainstorm storms you get in the shower or while doing brainless routine tasks? I think it has something to do with being totally relaxed, with better blood flow through the cranium, but I digress. The encouraging thought I had, is this: Act, and I quote, “as if it’s your last.” Act as if it’s your last. Let me explain. When you kiss your husband, kiss him like it’s your last kiss. When you hug your mom, hug her as if it’s your last hug. When you kiss and hug your grandkids, kiss and hug them as if it’s your last kiss and hug. When you write a note or write an assignment, write it as if it’s your last note or assignment. When you do a job or perform a service, do it as if it’s your last, your legacy. Leave a loving, caring footprint in this world as if it’s
your last loving, caring footprint. Isn’t that an encouraging word? Isn’t that a life-changing, behavior changing way to live? Will you join me in this rebellion, this radical revolution? You’ll never kiss, hug, write, work or leave footprints the same again. It reminds me of the lyrics of that Steve Green song, “Find us Faithful.” “May the footprints that we leave, lead them to believe and the lives we live, inspire them to obey. O may all who come behind us find us faithful.” Friends, when we love and serve one another, as if it’s your last time, we will be walking in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, at his LAST supper, stripped, stooped, and served as a slave, to wash his friends’ feet. Jesus was modeling servant leadership for his friends, because it was for the last time before the cross. You see, Jesus would soon show them and show the world, the full extent of his love. Jesus showed us how to love others, as if it were your last. So be encouraged this week as you kiss, hug, write, work, serve and
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love, as if it were your last....... Because one day...... it will be, .... That is until we meet again. Have an extravagantly encouraging week, as if it were your last.
Encouraged by a Word Change

I’m curious. I’m curious about your thoughts, your self-talk, you know, those words that rattle around your head, those words you tell yourself. And I’m particularly curious about your words when you aren’t looking forward to something, when you aren’t eager for that next task or activity. Say, Monday morning work, or doing the laundry, or mopping the floor, or going to the dentist’s office, or washing the car or cleaning out the garage. In cases like these, do you say to yourself, “I have to?” I have to work. I have to do the laundry. I have to mop the dirty floor. I have to go to the dentist’s office. I have to wash the cruddy car, or I have to clean out the cluttered garage. Is that what you say? I know, I know. That’s what I’ve said, many times. Yea, I’ve used those words. And even now, if I don’t think about it, if I’m not careful, thoughtful and deliberate, I still do. But here’s the encouragement. Here’s the
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encouraging one-word change. Instead of saying, “I have to,” say, “I get to.” Instead of “I have to” say, I get to. You’ve only changed one word, but think about the total attitude change, and your transformed mental state. You GET an opportunity to contribute, to make a difference in the world. You move from <say it slowly> “I h a v e to,” to <say it enthusiastically> “I get to!” You obviously have the time, the talents, the energy, the space, and the pace it takes. Now, just change your attitude and your approach, with one word. You GET to add value to the world. You GET to improve your surroundings. You GET to improve your personal well-being. Isn’t that joyful, uplifting and encouraging? You GET a personal boost from a one-word change. When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane praying before going to the cross, he wasn’t using these words, but in essence, he turned the “I have to go to the cross,” to “I get to go to the cross,” by telling his Father, “Not my will, but
thy will be done.” Not what I want, but what you want. I don’t have to, I get to. Hebrews 12:2 emphasizes this “I get to,” in this way, it says, “For the JOY set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Do you see it? Jesus didn’t have to, he got to! And that made an eternal, powerful, positive difference in my life and perhaps in yours. So, I encourage you my friends, make the one-word change and, in this way, you will GET to enjoy an encouraging week!
Encouraged by Holiness

I’m encouraged today by a few paragraphs in a book by Donald Nicholl, titled, Holiness. I read this book in June 1998 and the gripping thoughts from these few paragraphs have clung to me ever since. Oh, I don’t always live by them, but I’d like to. These paragraphs are both the simplest and the hardest you’ll ever hear, but for me, they are a huge encouragement.... And a challenge. I hope they will encourage you, too, and challenge you. I’m quoting from paragraphs on page 87. Listen closely, here goes, “... every single moment of our daily life, every experience, at whatever time and whatever place, can serve, and is meant to serve, as spiritual exercise – so long as we, by our attitude, recognize that the experience is meant for that purpose. Every single experience of our daily life is grist for the grinding stone of holiness. No experience is wasted. I speak of this truth as exhilarating
because if only we can accept it as true, then there is no way that we can lose. **We cannot lose once we realize that everything that happens to us is meant to teach us how to become holy.** Then, from every single event in our daily lives, we learn about ourselves and thereby come closer to our true selves; by the same token we come closer to the Holy One, who is even closer to our true selves than we are.” He goes on to ask, “why do so few people – even religious people – appear to accept it?” He writes, “The answer seems to be that most of us do not specially want to learn: we would rather have comfort than learning. And once we base our lives on comfort (or indeed anything other than holiness, such as ambition) then there is no way that we can win; at any moment our comfort may be disturbed.” So, what do you think? Does that not rock your boat of comfort? Does that NOT shake you to the core? Or are you open? Are you venturesome? Could you be ready to accept
the encouragement and challenge to live a “no lose” life of holiness? Sounds encouraging doesn’t it? Well, from my vantage point, the only one who makes us holy, the only one who makes us righteous is Jesus Christ, you know, “the way, the truth and the life.” So, as I’ve said in my ‘encouraged by balance podcast,’ we need to heed the call of Christ who said to you and to me, “Come unto me all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” So, my friends, as we heed the call, as we are yoked with Jesus and learn from him, as we learn about life, through calm and chaos, and as we learn about ourselves from the good, the bad and even the ugly, we cannot lose, we are bound to win and THAT is encouraging. So, my friends, take the challenge and have an encouraging week, yoked with Jesus on your way to holiness.
I’m encouraged by my grandkids again. I’ll call this part two or better yet, two for two, and I’ll tell you why in a moment. You see, back in May 2020, I wrote a podcast titled, “Encouraged by Grandkids.” My granddaughters from West Chester started using the app – Messenger kids – to stay in touch. Lisa and I just love it. We love being cared for by the grands. Technology sure helps do that. Yea, technology is marvelous and powerful, but quite honestly, it’s the love, care, compassion and personalities using the technology that melts your heart. I guess that’s why we have hearts of putty. Our hearts are so often melted by the kindness and care of grandkids. Well, I tell you that little background to introduce this episode I call two for two. Two for two. Let me explain. Yesterday we hired our seventeen-year-old granddaughter, Paige, to clean our house. She’s enterprising, energetic, a hard worker.
and a real organizer. She was looking for ways to earn some extra money, so we hired her. Well, let me tell you, only later in the evening, as I was heading toward bed, I noticed the phenomenal job she did in our bathroom. She took meticulous care in organizing my toothpaste, eye drops, deodorant, and scar crème. She turned my bathroom sink into a work of art! It’s now like a showcase. I was awe-struck and delighted. I’m going to try to keep it that way. After using each tube, I’ll carefully place it back in its assigned location. Thank you, Paige! You’re an inspiration to me. You’re a real encouragement. This reminds me of what our Wonderful, Creator God did with the glob of nothingness and chaos. God took it, spoke his creative word, organized it, and created everything beautifully and perfectly. That’s what I think about when I look at my bathroom sink. Well, that was yesterday. That was one for one. Today makes it two for two. Lisa was making the bed and getting
ready for the day when she heard her phone buzzing. It was the West Chester grandkids calling on Messenger. Turns out, Jacob, the two-year-old, wanted to come see us and play with our toy train. We had a delightful chat and reminded Jacob that we would see him tomorrow, but he couldn’t come see us today. He wasn’t happy about that! He wanted to be with us. Isn’t that just the sweetest thing? Doesn’t that melt your heart? Well, this reminds me that at a unique time in history, God just couldn’t stay away from us. God wanted to be with us, so God became a man, born into a poor family in Nazareth, and walked the earth with us, beside us and for us. God was born to us as Jesus because he just couldn’t stay away. He wanted to come be with us, not to play with our toy train, but to love, love, love us, and to form an intimate, personal, life-giving relationship with us. Doesn’t that melt your heart? So, friends, once again, I’m encouraged by grandkids, who remind me of
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God’s caring, creative, organizing power and God’s ‘heart-melting love,’ that wants to be with us and in us. I pray that you too, would see glimpses of God’s care, God’s compassion and God’s love in your family and be lifted up, to have an enormously encouraging week.
Encouraged by Reliability

I woke up today with a fresh cool breeze gently kissing my face. This welcoming sweet caress came from our quiet, reliable ceiling fan. That little extra cooling gives us a sound, serene sleep. It simply spins out its cool breeze gently and reliably all night. Oh, there’s another component of my sound sleep. It’s called a CPAP machine. About twenty-years ago or so, I was diagnosed with sleep apnea. The remedy for me is a machine which pushes positive air pressure into my nose, keeps me from snoring and gives me reliable restful REM sleep. This machine also runs soothingly and reliably all night long. Well, my encouragement today comes from thinking about the reliability of these machines and what these two devices have in common. They both are powered by the reliable 120 volts AC coming into our house. They both rely on the constant, reliable alternating current that consistently
flows into our house, day in, day out, come snow, sleet, freezing rain, wind, hail, or drought. They both rely on the nearly 100% reliability of PPL electric power in our service area. This PPL power is outstanding, rated in the top 10% of the nation and rated number one in the mid-Atlantic region. So, in my neck of the woods, they seem to be as reliable with constant power as are our Amish made cherry wood chairs around our kitchen table. They’ve never collapsed even once under my 187-pound load. Solid and reliable. So, in my house, when I flip a light switch, I could say, “let there be light, and it will appear.” So, I’m encouraged by reliability. Reliability like that of the nineteen-year old Toyota Rav 4 my seventeen-old granddaughter drives. It’s older than she is and has some 260 or 270 some thousand miles on it but gets her from point A to point B and back again. Old reliable. Reliable like the few good men in the Marine Corps, whose motto, Semper Fidelis, means, Always
Faithful. So, yea, today, I’m encouraged, no super encouraged by pure reliability. And, I say that especially in this time of our cultural shifting sands, ever changing COVID-19 research, and the ever-moving target of guidance on lock downs, mask wearing, distance keeping or opening up. I’m encouraged by reliability, like an immovable stake in the ground or an anchor in the angry waves of chaos. Now, you probably know what’s coming. Since I’m encouraged by reliability, I get extremely ramped up and encouraged by the 100%, no questions asked reliability of God’s word, God’s Son, God’s promises, and God’s love. When everything else in life slips, slides, crumple, topples or gets jumbled up, when the old Rav 4 dies, when the power goes out or even when my cherry wood chair collapses, God’s word, God’s Son, God’s promises and God’s love never will. They and they alone are 100 percent reliable and that my friends, is super encouraging. So, to have another
encouraging week, grab hold of the reliable, nail-pierced, loving, grace-filled hand of Jesus Christ, for he will never ever, ever let you go. He, the Father and the Holy Spirit are THAT reliable. Go in peace and encouragement because of reliability.
Encouraged by Purpose & Not Feelings

I woke up today feeling blah, blue, rudderless. Just not feeling it. Not my perky, energetic, positive self. But we had a short six-mile ride planned on the Northwest Lancaster County River Trail. I was going to meet an estimator about repairing our pondless waterfall. Then I was scheduled to have lunch with the new pastor of Wrightsville Presbyterian Church. And finally, Lisa and I were going to do some volunteer work at the Lancaster Liederkranz. Wew! A full day planned, despite how I felt. So, on our nine-mile foggy drive to the river trail, an encouraging thought settled over me, or enveloped me, even thicker than the fog. The thought was this: I’m encouraged by purpose and not by feelings. Let me repeat that. I’m encouraged by purpose and not by feelings. I learned this principle years ago from David K. Reynolds, author of, “Playing Ball on Running Water,” “Constructive
Living,” and a number of other helpful books. Mr. Reynolds taught me this encouraging concept. You can’t control your feelings. Your feelings are random, fleeting, up and down and all over the place. The only thing you CAN control is what you do. So, let me give you Moritist psychotherapy in a 1-2-3 nutshell. It’s quite encouraging. One, know your purpose. Two, accept your feelings. And three, do what needs to be done to accomplish your purpose. I’ll repeat this for you note takers. One, know your purpose. Two, accept your feelings. And three, do what needs to be done to accomplish your purpose. Friends, you can meditate on this, you can marinate in this and you can let this sink into your core. When you’ve sopped that up, it will give you a jolt of encouragement. Now, your purpose could be your purpose for the next hour, your purpose for today, your purpose for this week or it could be your purpose for your life. Your purpose orients you and focuses
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your efforts. The next step is to notice your feelings. Your feelings could be blah or blue or your feelings could be giddy or grand. It doesn’t matter. You simply notice your feelings, accept your feelings, and move on to what you need to do. The cool part is that, while you’re doing what needs to be done, your feelings MAY change, they MAY improve as you move closer to achieving your purpose. But since you can’t control or manipulate your feelings, they may not change or improve. It doesn’t matter. The bottom line and the encouraging word is that; “knowing your purpose” and achieving your purpose is a wonderful gift to you and to the world around you. So, since my purpose is encouraging you through short, simple podcast episodes, I now feel WAY better than my earlier blues and blahs. Ok, so guess what? The ball is now in your court. Know or discover your purpose, accept your feelings, and then do what needs to be done.
You’ll have an extremely encouraging week...... no matter how you feel.
Encouraged by Extreme Enthusiasm

I have a story to tell you today! I have a story to tell about extreme enthusiasm and initiative that will thrill you and encourage you. This story unfolds on a sunny Tuesday afternoon in West Chester, PA at the corner of Penny Lane and Ashbridge Street. It’s not the ideal spot for a pink lemonade stand, but it will have to do. At about 2pm, our three granddaughters, ages nine, seven, and five, with three of their close friends (who are neighbor girls about the same age), tooted a small table, a single chair, a half-gallon of pink lemonade, and some painted rocks wrapped in beautiful gift bags to the corner. Oh, and then one ran home to get the small plain cardboard sign with prices. Fifty cents for a cup of lemonade and two dollars for a hand painted rock. They had used a pink plastic wagon to haul the supplies to the corner, which I thought added just the right color to the pink lemonade stand. Well, that
was the setup, but what came next will delight you, thrill you and encourage you. When a car, a bike, a runner, or a walker came near, all six girls would jump up and down wildly, wave their arms excitedly and scream enthusiastically, “Penny Lane Pink Lemonade and Painted Rocks!” Their excitement, their energy and their extreme enthusiasm were contagious, hilarious, and encouraging. With this cheer, heads of drivers would swivel, cars would stop, cars would pull over, and cars would do U turns. They would let out another outrageous cheer. Mailman Mike stopped for a lemonade and gave a very generous tip. More cheering, more arm waving. A kind woman in hospital scrubs stopped, bought a hand painted rock, and then generously tipped each girl a dollar. More enthusiastic cheering, Penny Lane, Pink Lemonade and Painted Rocks. This stopped a West Chester maintenance truck. The kind gentlemen bought a rock. More energetic cheering. The
tree guys working down the lane stopped and bought a round of five drinks. The enthusiasm was unstoppable. Two well dressed women in a BMW with New York plates pulled to the side, bought four rocks, and donated three back. A skateboarder stopped, asked the girls which rock would be best for his girlfriend, then bought it. The electric energy and cheering continued. Then a female jogger came around the block for a second time. The first time around she huffed, “I have no money,” but the second time around, she stopped and dropped off a five-dollar bill she found while jogging. All this from the sheer energy, delight, and extreme enthusiasm from six encouraging young girls. I get an attitude boost just thinking about their extreme enthusiasm, their initiative, and their fun-loving spirits. Do I have to say it? It is powerfully life-giving and encouraging to hang out, even for a couple of hours, with those who have that unbridled pizazz, that electric energy, that delight, and
that enthusiasm for life and hope and goodness. For your encouragement, may you find your own Penny Lane Pink Lemonade stand entrepreneurs, and drink deep from God’s goodness, God’s sweetness, God’s energy, God’s encouragement, and God’s love. Oh, one more exciting thing. They packed up around 4pm and carried home a bag of bills totaling over seventy dollars. Extreme enthusiasm and encouragement are rewarded well! Have an extremely enthusiastic and encouraging week!
Encouraged by Positive Words

How many positive thoughts do you have? The number might depend on the number of positive words you consume. Are you focused on what’s possible? Your opportunities? Your developing new adventures? The promising positive possibilities that are ahead? Oh, I want that for you. I’d encourage you to start snacking on positive words. Start popping some positive words whenever you can. For, I believe that words are seeds for your thoughts. I thrive on positive words! I enjoy a banquet of uplifting words every day. It’s like dining at a king’s table, a queen’s feast of delicious delicacies of life-giving, hope filled, healing words. This daily diet of energizing, encouraging, enthusiastic words nourishes my thoughts and my outlook on life. It’s an exhilarating diet! Proverbs 23:7 says, “For as he thinks within himself, so he is.” (NAS). Thoughts shape us and make us, so the

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words we feed on, chew on, stew on, and digest, grow into our thoughts and our thoughts create us. You’ve probably heard the cliché, “you are what you eat.” Well, this is too simplistic, but it does contain a grain of truth. The Apostle Paul’s letter to the Philippians gives us another angle on this. In chapter 4, verse 8, it read, “Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is honorable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.” The Apostle Paul is urging positive thoughts and for positive thoughts, we need positive words. And that is our encouragement. May I suggest a homework assignment? A writing or drawing assignment to help you with positive words. You see, to change your diet, to ingest more positive words, you start by shopping for more positive words. Make a shopping list of pure positivity, new words for your recipes. Make a list of all the positive words, images,
ideas, and thoughts you can. Do some brainstorming. When you start, some of the positive words will grow branches of other positive words, which will grow leaves of more positive words. You’ll eventually have a whole tree of positive words to produce “fruit for thought.” Another technique is the mind mapping exercise. You start with a blank sheet of paper and place the words, ‘positive words,’ in the middle with a circle around it. From that circle, you draw lines out to make other circles with “positive words that are generated.” And from those circles draw lines with more circles with positive words generated by association. You’ll have a full page of positive words, and positive word associations. What a valuable way to seed your thoughts. For, when these positive words and positive thoughts intersect with your relationships, your to-do lists, your habits, and your goals, they’ll generate an encouraging “new you.” You’ll become more upbeat, positive, happy and encouraging.
When these positive words become daily snacks, your daily diet, your daily caloric intake, you’ll find those words from Ralph Waldo Emerson coming true, “Sow a thought, reap an action. Sow an action, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny.” With your new menu of positive words, have a phenomenal, upbeat, energizing, engaging, and encouraging destiny!
Encouraged by Effort

We were dog sitting our grand dog, Seneca, over the weekend. On Sunday morning, I woke up a few minutes after 5am, drank a glass of water, let Seneca out of her crate to stretch, then took her outside for a 20-minute walk. I thought for sure she’d have to pee, but nooo – not a drop. I brought her in, fed her and watched her gobble down a cup and a half of food and lap up some water. An hour later, I took her out again for a shorter walk. Surely, she’d do her business, but again, nooo. I was doing all I could, with no success. I made the effort but came up short. Then a little after 7am, Lisa noticed the pile of dog poop in the family room and as I got closer with the paper towels and vinegar water, I saw the puddle of pee. Ugh! I sighed, cleaned up the mess and lamented the failure. What went wrong? I made all the right moves. I exerted the effort. I did what I could, yet boom, fell flat, went bust, failed
somehow. So, as I sat there stewing in this situation, reflecting on my failing grade, I realized this: Effort IS success. Effort IS success. I was successful in doing what I could. But some events, some messes, and some smelly piles are quite simply out of my control. I did control what I could. Effort is success. You know what? There’s a powerful life lesson in this. Despite our best, heroic efforts, there are many situations, relationships, misfortunes, and accidents that are uncontrollable. So, when we apply the effort, when we do what we can, rather than grade ourselves as failures, we MUST grade ourselves as successful. For effort IS success. Isn’t that encouraging? With that, let me take you across a short bridge. As we cross this bridge from “effort is success,” we’re going to a land of peace, joy, faith, love, righteousness, and life! Real life! We’re going to an abundant “life land.” So, come with me across this bridge. We’re able to cross this bridge when we realize that “belief IS
righteousness.” “Belief in Jesus Christ” IS our righteousness. Belief in Jesus Christ IS our righteousness. Just as “effort is success,” “believing in Jesus” is our righteousness, “believing in Jesus is our healing, believing in Jesus is our wholeness, and believing in Jesus is our salvation. Just as we can’t control the outcomes of our efforts, so we can’t work hard enough for our salvation. We can’t deserve salvation; we can’t earn salvation. There’s nothing we can do for our salvation, or for real life, but believe in Jesus Christ. Believe that Jesus Christ came to give us salvation, to give us real life, to give himself up so we would live. We simply must believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to take our place, to die in our place, to pay for our brokenness, to make us righteous. So, if we can apply the effort to walk the dog every hour and apply the effort to clean up the mess in our family room, we can certainly believe in Jesus Christ. And, when we do, voila! We’ve crossed the bridge to the land
of the living. Welcome to the land of encouragement. Welcome to the land where believing in Jesus Christ is real life, abundant life, eternal life! Welcome to the land where believing in Jesus Christ is our righteousness. And, that my friends, is super encouraging. Have an amazing and encouraging week!
Encouraged by Presence

I’m encouraged today by presence! Oh, I don’t mean gifts, wrapped boxes with bows or gift bags with colored tissue paper. I mean presence, spelled p r e s e n c e. (note – this was written for audio). I mean the presence of God. I mean the personal, intimate presence of the holy, all-powerful, all-loving eternal God. THAT presence. When I think about THAT presence, THAT love, THAT care, THAT sacrifice, I get an overwhelming feeling of encouragement. I mean, like – what else or who else would I need? Friends, God majors in presence. And God’s presence is radically encouraging. Let me explain. At the beginning of the Bible, in Genesis 3 we read, “Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.” From the beginning of time, the Lord God was present among his
people. God was present and wanted a personal, intimate relationship with his people. As we read the scriptures, we see that throughout history, God was present with his people. God spoke to his people through visions, through angels, through dreams, through prophets, and even through pillars of smoke and pillars of fire. God was persistently present with and for his people. There are so many examples of this. When Moses was turning over leadership to Joshua, he said, “Be strong and courageous.” Then he said, “for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you or forsake you.” God is present and will always be present with you. How radically encouraging. Then in Bethlehem, God was born to us, to be present with us, in the form of Jesus. This child, Jesus, was called Immanuel, which means “God with us.” God loves to be with us. God loves to be present for us. And that powerful presence encourages me, because God who is present, loves, loves, loves me.
And, God who is present, loves, loves, loves you. He loves us so much that, as Jesus, he walked among us, full of grace and truth and abounding love. He loves us so much that he took all our sins on His back as he went to the cross. Then after rising from the dead, reminded us and his other close friends, “I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” So, what do you think? Do you feel the presence of the all-powerful, all-loving God? He IS present with you now and he always will be! So, be encouraged and be loved.

Near the end of the scriptures, in Revelation 21, we read, “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,” It then goes on to say, “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people and he will dwell with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God.’” Friends, God’s encouraging presence is constant, from the beginning of time to the end of time! So, with
that, join me in being encouraged by God’s loving, caring, sacrificing, pursuing presence. Have an encouraging week in the presence of the Almighty!
Encouraged by a Neighbor

It was a warm, humid, blustery morning on the Northwest Lancaster County River Trail. Lisa and I arrived early and were pedaling by 6:45am. We were riding into a gusty wind from the west. It seemed as though the gusts started suddenly, so I glanced at the Accuweather radar app on my phone to check for storms. The radar was clear, so we pedaled on. When we got to an open field with beans on both sides of the path, a wind gust suddenly ripped Lisa’s sun visor from her helmet. Woosh! Flew right past my head. We stopped and pulled off the path for her to retrieve it and cinch it back on her helmet. While we were stopped, a lone female cyclist slowed down and asked if we were ok. We said we were, but WOW, THAT was encouraging. That was life-giving. That was delightful, inspiring, and amazing, given the dangerous state of the world. When fellow travelers, complete strangers notice a need or
a possible breakdown, and offer to come to our aid! It reminded me of my July second “over the handlebars,” bike accident. In that episode, two trail angels stopped to help us back to the car. They quickly dug out tissues for my wounds, poured their bottled drinking water on my bloody knuckles and rode the mile with us to the car. Quite the encouragement. Even in this troubled world, where we ignore one another, and are afraid to get involved, God sends people into our lives to ask if we’re ok and to offer a hand. That’s encouraging. That’s downright neighborly. Remember when an expert in the law asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life? Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind. And love your neighbor as yourself.” Then the expert asked, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus then explained the concept of neighbor with the Parable of the Good Samaritan. In a nutshell, Jesus
showed this so-called expert that a neighbor sees a need and fills it. A neighbor crosses cultural boundaries, religious boundaries, prejudice boundaries, and racial boundaries to show mercy. A neighbor stops along their path, interrupts their life, interrupts their to-do list, interrupts their plans to offer a helping hand. So today, I was encouraged by a neighbor, a neighbor I had never met. Well, Lisa had her visor cinched onto her helmet, so we continued on our way. This time her visor stayed on, even in another blustery open field. Now for the irony. In that open field, we encountered a young couple stopped along the path. The girl was crouched down working on her bike as the guy with a skateboard looked on. I couldn’t help but ask the question, “Are you guys ok?” They smiled and said yes, so we pedaled on. So, I wonder ..... who will be stopped along your path today? Will you see them? And will you, with God’s love in your heart, reach out and offer a helping hand?
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(no matter who they are?) Will you be a neighbor? Friends, your encouragement, your mercy could change a life and change the world. Have an encouraging, neighborly, merciful week!
Encouraged by Coffee Cups

Do you have a favorite coffee cup? Or do you have a few favorite coffee cups that you rotate, maybe use every day? If so, what makes them your favorite? The feel? The design? The color? What it says? Who gave it to you? Or perhaps a combination of some of the above?

Well, I have favorites that fit most of the above categories, but today is Friday, our day with four of our grandkids. Today I use a coffee cup from my son and daughter-in-law, the parents of the four grands. It not only came from two special people. It not only has a smooth feel to it, but here’s what it says.... In gold letters on a white background: “The only thing better than having you as my Dad is my children having you as their Pop Pop.” “The only thing better than having you as my Dad is my children having you as their Pop Pop.” That melts my heart! I love drinking
my Starbucks Espresso from this cup! I love the sentiment, I love the givers, I love the grandkids, and when I received it, I choked up. It’s one of the most encouraging banners in my life. It’s an early morning reminder that I’m loved, deeply loved. It’s a strong sip of encouragement. Oh, I have another favorite cup. This cup was given to me by a very special saint from West Grove Presbyterian Church at my retirement party. This is a beautiful black cup that says in white letters, “You cannot be RETIRED from being AWESOME.” I’ll say that again. “You cannot be RETIRED from being AWESOME.” This cup also melts my heart every time I look at it. It’s a little jolt of encouragement, a reminder that I made a difference, an affirmation of my ministry at West Grove, a cup that boldly reminds me, “I touched lives with God’s generous love.” So today, I’m richly blessed and encouraged by reminders that I’m loved, I’m appreciated, and I’m a very special gift from God. But,
friends, what I want for you to hear is this. SO ARE YOU! SO ARE YOU! You are a very dear, beloved, beautiful, talented, and gifted child of God. Know this and be encouraged. You were lovingly knit together in your mother’s womb. You were made in love, you were born in love, you were blessed by God’s love, and you were loved enough to die for.... By Jesus Christ, God’s only Son. So, please hear this: Be reminded of this love. Marinate in this love. Soak in this love. Feel this love around you, in you, and for you, even if you don’t have the coffee cup. When you drink deep of this glorious, generous, gracious love, you’ll live as one radically encouraged. Meanwhile, I’ll take another sip of the super strong, caffeinated Spirit of God’s love and encouragement. With that, have an encouraging week in the Lord, knowing how much you’re loved.
Encouraged by Synergy and Teamwork

My daily Bible reading encouraged me today! Well, it always encourages me, but today a concept jumped out of those pages of God’s Word that shook me, grabbed me, and reminded me how encouraging it is to work together in teamwork and synergy. I was reading 1 Corinthians 14, listening to the Apostle Paul deal with worship. Paul said that each worshiper brings a word, a hymn, an encouragement, an interpretation to the gathered assembly so that the church might be built up. Then the last verse of the chapter says, “but everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.” The King James Version says, “Let all things be done decently and in order.” And that, my friends, is practically the Presbyterian mantra. Do everything decently and in order. So, as I think about this godly wisdom and encouragement, my mind drifts to those examples of teamwork, synergy and working
together I’ve seen in life. I don’t know about you, but I’ve seen oodles of these examples in life. I’ll only mention a few, but my hope is that these will dredge up your own examples and encourage your imagination. My ninth grade Hempfield football team went undefeated because of teamwork; perfect snaps from our big bruising center, perfect handoffs to talented running backs and excellent blocking by tough lineman. We worked hard to perfect our game and the results were a perfect record. My Air National Guard unit in Delaware, flew C-130s safely all over the world by strict adherence to flight crew checklists, disciplined call and response to these checklists and robust crew conversations in mission decision making. Each professional crewmember was invited to provide their unique expertise for the mission. Not too much and not too little, but timely inputs for the overall good of the crew and the success of the mission. The 166 Airlift Wing was
and is and outstanding unit. I was blessed to be part of it. Their synergy and teamwork were and are radically encouraging. I often compare cockpit coordination and teamwork to a symphony, where each instrument comes in at just the right time with just the right tone! The result is a spine-tingling, world-class performance. And, finally, as a Presbyterian, I’ve seen synergy and teamwork in well-run meetings. Meetings where the agenda was sent out a few days prior, where participants knew their roles, participants knew the expectations and how they could contribute. Meetings that fostered robust discussions of the issues (not personalities), and where all participated. At this point, I imagine you have your own unique examples of how you, your team, your family, or your organization harmonize efforts, make extraordinary handoffs, synchronize contributions, communicate like cockpit crew members, and add phenomenal value to God’s gorgeous creation. For your
encouragement today, think about how this happens. Relive your finest teamwork moments. What were the underlying processes? What foundations were laid? What were the principles employed? Who were the players? Now, for your encouragement, employ these techniques, teach these techniques, coach these techniques, and reap the encouraging benefits. In doing this, you’ll be a powerfully productive participant in God’s coming kingdom..... decently and in order, of course. And THAT is encouraging! Have a synergistically encouraging week!
Encouraged by Lively Greetings

Energetic, exciting greetings are encouraging! Have you ever done a double take when you received an “over the top” greeting? Like, when you said, “Hi, how are you?” They reply, “FANTASTIC!” (said with exuberance). Or when you ask, “how are you?” they reply excitedly, “Phenomenal!” You get that little neck twist, that little extra jolt of encouragement. A hearty greeting rips you out of your rut of routine responses, like, “fine,” (said, trailing off with no energy to finish the word). Or “How are you?” and you reply, “ok,” (like I’m barely alive, just taking my last few breaths.) Friends, you know this! Hearty, healthy, high energy greetings and responses lift our spirits. They herald the fact that there’s hope, there’s life, there are possibilities, even in a brief encounter with another human. I know it’s cliché, but a high energy greeting is like a rising tide and a rising tide lifts ALL the boats. A gleeful,
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generous greeting may put a little smile on your face or a spark of joy in your heart. Just the other day I was greeted in the local Giant store by a lean young man cleaning the carts. Had a rag in one hand and a spray bottle in the other. The guy with perhaps the least preferred, lowest respected job in the store. But this gentleman said something with a large smile like, “Good Morning! How are YOU this beautiful day?” He announced it with so much umph, so much gusto, I almost stopped in my tracks. What an encouraging greeting! He made me smile, lifted my spirits. What fun! This made me think about greetings. A high energy, encouraging greeting changes the atmosphere, changes attitudes, and changes the world. It only takes a few seconds, but there is a lasting value. Puts a spring in our step, a smile on our face, health in our hearts, joy on our journey. When Jesus walked among us, his most common greeting was, “Peace!” “Peace be with you!” “Peace be unto you!” You see,
Jesus knew our plight. Jesus came into our fearful, frightened, anxious midst and came to change us; came to change the world. Jesus knew we needed a powerful reminder that HE not only BRINGS peace, but He IS peace. When Jesus IS among us, we have HIS peace – HIS perfect peace! His presence IS our peace, and HIS light banishes the darkness. So, Jesus comes into our presence and proclaims “Peace,” “Peace be with you!” Now we don’t know HOW he said it, but I imagine he proclaimed it powerfully, pointedly, with authority, and with boldness so that his friends would feel peace, be encouraged by peace and live in peace. I’m sure he said it in a way that changed the room, changed the atmosphere, changed attitudes, and changed lives. So, friends, two things. Thing one, be encouraged by the presence of the Prince of Peace. Be encouraged by his generous, gentle, gracious greeting of perfect peace. And thing two, put some creative, enthusiasm
in your greetings. Put some energy and excitement in your greetings. You’ll bless, encourage and change lives! With that, have a phenomenally encouraging and life-changing week!

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Encouraged by a Fast Pace

I know a very simple trick that will give you a boost of encouragement! This trick is so simple, I’m frankly embarrassed to share it with you, but it works! I’ve used it and by golly it really works. Give it a try and see if I’m right. Ok, are you ready for it? Listen closely. It’s very simple. I don’t want you to miss it. The simple encouragement boosting trick is this: Walk faster! Yea walk faster! Move more quickly. Take longer strides. Move those little legs briskly and boldly. That’s it. That’s the trick. It’s truly amazing how a simple ‘gait’ change affects your whole attitude. (oh, and for you frequent fliers, I’m not talking about an airport gate change, but that will put a spring in your step, won’t it?) No, what I mean is, when you quicken your pace, your attitude and demeanor follow and also quicken. You FEEL better. You feel more alive! Hey, give it a try. See for yourself. You’ll feel more confident. You’ll
feel bolder. You’ll look like “you’re on a mission.” You’ll turn heads as one who seems to be laser guided, laser focused. You’ll create an attractive, magnetic affect. People may stop, take notice, and believe in your abilities. Friends, this simple technique creates an encouraging energy in and around you. You’ll produce waves of energy that will emanate from your trail blazing, like contrails from a jet. Seriously, give it a try. Test this concept in your life, then note the affect. You’ll be amazed. Oh, one more thing. I find this fascinating. There are 58 times in the New Testament gospels and book of Acts where the word, “immediately,” is used. Of these 58, 41 are used in the Gospel of Mark. Let me give you just two examples. In the first chapter of Mark, Jesus was baptized in the River Jordan. As he arose from this baptism, a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased.” Immediately the Spirit sent Jesus out into the wilderness. Immediately. No
time to bask in this glory. No time for the baptismal party. No, there was an urgency. There was work to be done.... Immediately. The pace was set. The story leaps forward. In that same chapter, Jesus is calling some disciples. He called Simon and his brother Andrew from their fishing boat with, “Come, follow me and I will send you out to fish for people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. Immediately. An immediate response to the call of Christ. Jesus’ words create energy, life, encouragement, and momentum. I love how the gospel writer, Mark, instills this fast pace, and good news excitement. The Father speaks, the Spirit sends, Christ calls and the story of encouraging news bounds forward. Those are only two of the 41 uses of immediately in Mark. I simply love the forward momentum, the energy, the excitement, the grand, gloriously good news of God’s plan, God’s pleasure, God’s purpose, and God’s grace in Jesus Christ. So, friends, just as God is all
loving, and God is all powerful, and God is all-encouraging, God’s got it, as we hurl toward our bold, beautiful future. So, for this reason, you and I can stride briskly, boldly forward with our hope, our hearts, and our hands in the Lord’s. Your new pace will do wonders for you and shape your new attitude. Have an energetic, fast paced, encouraging week!
Encouraged by a New Day

Today I’m encouraged by a new day! Does that sound strange? Let’s think about it. This is a brand-new day. There’s never ever been a day like today in the billions of years of history. This is an original one, a new one, and it’s unfolding right before our eyes. Maybe scripture says it best, “This is the day the Lord has made, so I will rejoice and be glad in it.” Now here’s why I’m so encouraged by a new day. Yesterday, I may have offended someone with a political email. Yesterday I may have posted, liked, or commented on a social media site that seemed inappropriate, nasty, or hurtful. That was yesterday. But, when this is pointed out, when I realize my mistake, when I come to grips with, ‘I may have offended someone,’ when my typing on a device is not helpful or encouraging, and at worst, even hurtful, I can apologize, seek forgiveness, seek peace and seek reconciliation, but after that, I’m
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powerless. It’s spilled milk. It’s water over the dam. That ship has sailed. It’s past, it’s done, and it can’t be changed. So, that’s why I’m glad it’s a new day today. Today I get a clean slate, a tabula rasa, a blank sheet, a new start, a plain ‘white board,’ a clear computer screen with just a little blinking cursor. Yea, that’s encouraging. I know it’s overused, but today is the first day of the rest of my life. What an adventure! What hope! What unlimited possibilities. Today is a gift, a present to be carefully and lovingly unwrapped and enjoyed. Today I will make new footprints in the sand. Do you see why this is SOOO encouraging? I get to start over. And friends, what I dearly love about a new day is that I get to bask in the light, love, and forgiveness of Almighty God. I get to read, ponder, reflect on, and live into God’s loving Holy Word. For over and over, I’m reminded that today God is doing a new thing. In Isaiah 43 God says, “Forget the former things, do not dwell on the past. See,
I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.” And in Revelation 21 God says, “I am making everything new.” You see, through God’s love, God’s grace, God’s sacrifice, my faults, my failures, my brokenness are all wiped away. For listen, from the insanely cruel, bloody cross, Jesus prays, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.” When I simply reach out and ask, when I place myself in that raucous crowd, when I acknowledge my guilt, I’m forgiven, wiped clean, made whole, made pure, and made righteous. I’m made new by the dark red blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Finally, when Christ was about to take his last breath on the cross, he said, “It is finished.” It is done. And with that, I know I’m free, I’m clean, I’m righteous. For, he didn’t say, “It’s begun, it’s in process, it’s underway, there’s more to be done.” No, he said, “IT IS FINISHED.” Our cleansing, our forgiveness
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is complete. We’re new people in a new day, and it’s called today. So, do you see why I love this new day? Do you see why I’m super encouraged? I hope you are too! Friends have a fabulously encouraging week as you live into it, completely forgiven and brand-new!
Encouraged by a Question

Have you ever been asked a question that inspired you, challenged you and encouraged you? Have you ever asked yourself one of those questions? Well, yesterday, I was asked one of THOSE questions. I’ll tell you about it in a moment, but before I do, are you now thinking about questions? The questions we’re asked and the questions we ask ourselves can encourage us or they can wreak havoc on our lives. You see, questions are powerful thought generators. Our brains are designed to answer questions. Let me give you some examples. When someone asks us a question like, “Why are you so dumb?” Our brains go to work. Our brains scour the data, scan for the images, mine for the memories, and search for stored up comments to answer that question. Our minds don’t care what the question is, they just want to answer it. It might answer with, “why of course I’m dumb. I’ve made stupid
decisions, I’ve been told before I’m dumb, and I sometimes even look dumb.” Our brains are ‘answer production’ factories. They’ll work on answering any questions. If you ask yourself, “Why am I fat? Why can’t I get ahead? Why do I constantly fail?” your brain will work diligently to support your question and give you all the reasons. In football lingo, it will just ‘pile on’ the reasons. You’ll feel stuck in your condition. Do you see why questions are so powerful? From now on, for your encouragement, be very careful how you phrase your questions. From now on, ask yourselves questions that will boost your image, enhance your life, motivate you in new ways. Ask yourself, “What makes me so positive? Why am I so loved? What could I produce today? How could I contribute today? Who could I encourage this week?” Do you see the difference? Your brain will happily go to work on these questions and provide you evidence that will boost your image,
productivity, energy, and joy! Got it? Ok, now for the question I was asked. My granddaughter, Ella, emailed this question, “Pop Pop, next time you come over, could you bring your book? I would like to see it and ask some questions like, how you made it a book, and how you wrote all of it. Love, Ella.” Friends, that question supercharged me and encouraged me. “Of course,” I responded, “I’d be happy to do that.” But you know what? It also made me think about how I produced the book, “Encouragement,” and the process I used to write it. My brain went to work on these positive questions. It was a fun, helpful exercise. I won’t belabor the technical side of it, but Kindle Direct Publishing by Amazon is an outstandingly simple process. The other answer to, ‘how I wrote all of it’ is this: Day by day, word by word, episode by episode. And to be brutally honest, each episode was a creative gift from God. God gave me the thoughts, the images, the connections, and the scriptures, and I
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wrote them down with a fountain pen in a journal. I couldn’t rush the process or force an episode. Oh, I’ve tried. It’s a process of patiently waiting on the Lord to fill my heart and mind with inspirational ideas. So, if your next question is, “What do you do while you wait?” That’s easy. I read God’s word. I reflect on God’s word. I pray about applying God’s word. Then I watch, listen, and wait. With that, may YOU ask yourself GREAT questions. May you ask yourself encouraging energy producing questions. And may God encourage you while you wait. Have encouraging week in the Lord.
Encouraged by My Name

“She said my name! She said my name!” shrieked Jacob my two-year old grandson, as he danced around the playroom! It was hilarious watching his reaction! I had asked Alexa this question, “Who is my sixth grandchild?” Alexa dutifully responded in her charming voice, “That would be Jacob Paul Gross, born on March third, 2018. He missed March second by 20 minutes or so, which is Paul Labonte’s birthday.” Jacob heard his name and started his dance! Let me fill you in on a couple details. First, Paul Labonte is Jacob’s other grandfather. Second, your Alexa won’t answer that question. I used the Amazon Blueprints skill to program my Alexa with answers to specific questions. My Alexa will name all my grandkids and give their birthdays. AND, if you ask MY Alexa, “Who is the best pop pop in the world?” well, it will say, “I just compared all the pop pops in history and my conclusion is
that pop pop Gross is the best.” But I digress. Friends, here’s the deeper point. Our names are special, very special. We all love hearing our names. We love being called by name. Oh, maybe not by parents, who with a raised voice call us by our full given Christian name, but you get the idea. Think about some of your pleasant experiences. You enter a store, and the clerk calls you by name. You walk into your favorite hotel and the desk clerk welcomes you by name. You make a deposit at your bank and the customer service agent says, “Good morning, and uses your name.” You feel special, cared for, unique, and valued. We love to hear our names. During my ministry at West Grove Presbyterian Church, I’d work hard to remember visitors’ names. I’d jot them down on a bulletin, I’d note them in my phone, and I’d review the list of visitors every Sunday before the service. It didn’t come easy or naturally for me, but I knew the importance of remembering names, and greeting people by
name. Do you remember the TV series, Cheers? The theme song said, “where everybody knows your name.” I heard a pastor make the statement that people are more eager to attend a Cheers bar than a church service, partly because it’s more honest, more real, more down to earth, and more intimate. Everyone knows your name. Our names are special, and we’re encouraged when we hear them. But listen, here’s where it gets even better. We can be super encouraged because God knows us all by name and God uniquely calls us by name. In Isaiah 43:1 God says, “...Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.” In Psalm 139 the psalmist writes, “You have searched me, Lord and you know me.” Friends be encouraged because you are uniquely and beautifully made in God’s image. And be encouraged because God deeply loves you and calls you by name. I received a coffee cup from a saint at West Grove Presbyterian
that says, “Jesus thinks I’m to die for.” That’s how much we’re loved! So, if God loves us, if God knows us, and if God calls us by name, we can live joyously, and outrageously with encouragement. Because, if you’re like me and my grandson Jacob, that’s music to your ears. You can do the happy dance in your playroom saying, “God said my name! God said my name!” With that encouragement, you could make someone’s day if you would simply smile and greet them by name. It’s not difficult, most store employees wear name tags. Have an amazing and encouraging week!
Encouraged by Ecclesiastes

I get super encouraged by God’s perfect, holy, timeless word! But, if you’re a reader or podcast listener, you already know that. So, here’s the thing, and I highly recommend it. I read through the Bible every year from cover to cover. I use a ratty, old, beat-up calendar of readings – been using it for countless years. These readings are listed every day, as an Old Testament reading for the morning and a New Testament reading for the evening. I do both in the morning as part of my devotions. So, on January first I start in both Genesis and Matthew. On December thirty-first, I end in Malachi and Revelations. Well, today is September 15th, I was finishing four days in Ecclesiastes. Here’s what jumped out as sooo encouraging. The wise King Solomon, the presumed writer of Ecclesiastes, was giving some solid economic advice. He writes this, “Invest in seven ventures, yes, in eight; you do not know what
disaster may come upon the land.” Did you hear that? He wisely tells us to diversify our investments and spread out our risks. You have no way to know which investments will thrive and which ones will tank, because of some random catastrophe. This seems timely for the year 2020, doesn’t it? Thank you, King Solomon. Then a few verses later he pens even more economic advice: “Sow seeds in the morning and at evening let your hands not be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.” Once again, he advises a diversity! A diversity of efforts. Keep at it. Keep moving. Keep serving. Keep working. Keep studying. Keep producing value. Keep using your God-given gifts. In doing this, you’re faithfully fulfilling your God-given role, you’re faithfully building the beautiful kingdom of God, and you’re faithfully honoring the One who bountifully blessed you with gifts, talents, time and treasures. Now listen, it gets even better. Just
as this wise teacher gives solid economic advice, he also gives outstanding “life” advice. Listen. In three different verses in Ecclesiastes he says a variation on this theme: “I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink and find satisfaction in all their toil – this is the gift of God.” So, friends, do you hear the encouragement? Our powerful encouragement today comes from one of the wisest teachers God placed on earth. Not the wisest teacher, mind you, for that would be God’s Son, Jesus Christ, but a very wise one, nevertheless. So be encouraged by King Solomon, to be happy, to do good work, to eat and drink and to love and honor God in all you do. For this wise king concludes Ecclesiastes with this: “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.” And I would add this – if you can’t keep all God’s
commandments (and spoiler alert, you can’t), believe in, trust in, and place your faith in Jesus Christ, who did keep All God’s commandments perfectly and loves you enough to give you His perfect, holy righteousness. With that, you can’t help but have an encouraging week and perhaps as a bonus, even a profitable week.
Encouraged by a Brunch

Have you ever been encouraged by an image, a random thought, a piece of music, a passing comment, or something that suddenly fires a synapse in your brain that takes you to a whole new peaceful place? Well, that happened to me yesterday. My mind does some fantastic travel tricks. Never know where it might take me. Lisa and I were eating lunch with our grandson, Jacob, at the Casey Jones Restaurant in Strasburg, PA. I looked over and saw an Asian young man seated alone, peacefully enjoying a brunch. He was serenely crouched over a plate of scrambled eggs, toast, hash browns and a coffee. His head was buried, unhurried in a periodical. He seemed peaceful and serene, almost in slow motion, so detached from the world, that that same serene feeling flooded over me. This feeling whisked me away to a cruise ship, a leisurely breakfast on our veranda, raisin bran, English muffin,
marmalade, fruit yogurt, black coffee.
Lounging peacefully and serenely in a thick white cozy robe, watching the world go by, wave by wave. Listening to the water lapping the sides of the ship, broken occasionally by the call of a seagull. Taking life breath by breath, heartbeat by heartbeat, no hustle, no hurry, no anxiety, no expectations, no schedule, no head full of clamoring voices, no drum beat of texts or emails. Just peace. God’s perfect peace. Life at a slower, gentler, more graceful pace. Life as God intended it. This is such an encouraging image. For me, it’s an image of being disconnected from the daily glimpses of hell, the open fire hydrant of torrential news, shootings, lootings, protests, tropical storms parading through the Atlantic toward their Gulf coast finish line, fiery west coast infernos licking up lives, livelihoods, homes, memories, and photo albums with their dragon-like tongues of fire. For me, it’s an image of God’s coming peaceable kingdom, a return to the Garden
of Eden, where the lion lies down with the lamb, where a little child will lead them. That’s what a mere image of brunch did to me today. So, I’m going to go back to Casey Jones Restaurant again. I’m going back to perchance, soak in that Garden of Eden setting, take life at a slower pace, gaze at the rolling farmland, listen to train music, watch an occasional steam engine chug by, and maybe mind travel again with God’s Holy Spirit toward God’s intended future. That’s what I’ll do. But, I suppose I can’t force an encouraging image, thought, or stanza of music on you, it seems to happen by God’s providence, in God’s unique timing, but you can slow yourself down, sit peacefully in a chair, sip your tea, watch nature dance before you, and let your mind take you to a happy peace-filled place. Soak in your senses, enjoy the visit, savor the flavor of perfect peace. Then, of course, give thanks to God for your mini vacation, your small slice of heaven on earth, the sampler, the hors d’oeuvres of
God’s coming peaceable kingdom. God will bring about His perfect peace. He promised! With that preview of coming attractions, have an encouraging week!

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Encouraged by Uniqueness

I didn’t sleep well last night. I went to bed early but woke up at 1am for a little while – not sure why or for how long. Then at about 3am I woke up, laid there for a while, random thoughts racing around, to do lists leaping about, schedules scattering, and pestered by pondering projects. I kept closing my eyes thinking surely it’s not time to get up. But, at about 3:40am, I threw off the covers, got my cycling clothes on, and went downstairs. Usually I do my exercises before breakfast, but today was drastically different. I made espresso, ate some wheat checks, blueberry yogurt, and read my Biblical devotions in Isaiah and Galatians. Then in prayer, God encouraged me. I was overwhelmed with encouragement and I hope it encourages you too. I was encouraged by my uniqueness. Simple, but profound. Encouraged by my uniqueness. I’m the only ME there is. I’m unique in my random,
crazy, zany ideas. I’m unique in my sleeping habits. I’m unique in my worries and anxieties. I’m unique in my hopes and dreams. I’m unique in my lack of attention to details. I’m unique in my directional ‘challengedness.’ And I’m unique in my inability to fill my fountain pens without getting ink all over my fingers. So, God encouraged me in my uniqueness, but it’s scriptural. It’s all over God’s Word. I’ll share just a few. Psalm 139 tells us, “I praise you (referring to the Lord) because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” Genesis 1 says, “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them.” Ephesians 2 says to us, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.” Finally, in Isaiah 64, “Yet you, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.” Friends, listen. I was lovingly shaped, formed, and molded by the loving,
Holy God. God made me unique. It’s who I am. And the truth is, so were you! So WERE YOU! You were lovingly shaped, formed, and molded by the loving, Holy God. You were made unique. So, no matter what our foibles, failures, fumbles, or foul-ups, we can gather it all up, embrace our individual uniqueness, and use it all to uniquely respond in love, worship, and service to Almighty God. We can sing, even imperfectly, and out of tune (well, that’s just me), praises to our Holy, Almighty Creator. We can pray, pout, pontificate, and point to the Holy One who shaped us in love, reaches for us in love, and sacrificed for us in love. Friends as we are encouraged by our uniqueness, as we celebrate our uniqueness, and as we respond to God’s love in relationship, we come ever closer to our intended true identity. So, however crazy, zany, silly or nilly you are.... Thank God, praise God, love God, and uniquely love one another faithfully and fully. Your uniqueness
and my uniqueness make the world an exciting place, a rich adventure. I hope that encourages you! It certainly encourages me. So, have a uniquely encouraging week!

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Encouraged by Peace in the Tension

I think it may have been the two double espressos this morning, but I was feeling a bit jittery, a little fluttery, ok, a little jumpy. Yea, maybe I should cut back a little on those jolts of caffeine. Well, nothing to do about it now, I’ll start that tomorrow, but today, I guess I’ll push through it. We were on our way to our morning ride on the Northwest Lancaster County River Trail and I felt that jittery tension, an unsettled feeling. Probably had some of life’s other tensions rattling around in my brain. But, then this radically encouraging thought flooded over me. God’s All-powerful and Almighty Holy Spirit showed up just at the right time. With God’s help and my concurrence, I can experience peace. I can experience perfect peace, right now, even in this tension. In other words, there are and there will be a slew of tensions that come my way, a tsunami of tensions that are thrust upon us, but here’s the thought.
We can lay hold of God’s perfect peace by naming the tensions, acknowledging the tensions, and then realizing that God is FOR us and WITH us no matter what, even in this tension. When we realize this, we’re not facing the tensions of life alone. With God’s help, we can decide to live peacefully! Peacefully, even in the tensions of life. Now, I don’t know if they’re affecting you, but I’m feeling tons of tensions pulling at me these days. I feel the avalanche of tensions in the country’s divisions, hatreds, riots, lootings, and shootings. I feel the tensions over the pandemic responses or non-responses. I feel the tensions over police officers trying to enforce the law, tensions over whether to believe scientists, tensions over trusting Congress, tensions over trusting the President, tensions over trusting the media, and tensions over the glut of political ads. Americans seem to be at one another’s throats and that’s causing me tension. I’m feeling the tensions right now as I simply jot
down a few. And this list doesn’t even count the tensions in our homes – relationship tensions, purchasing tensions, travel decision tensions, generational tensions, and oh my, the list goes on. So, God’s generous revelation to me this morning was this. Yes, you live in the face of tensions, and you will always live in the face of tensions, but you can do this – you can be aware of them, you can notice them, you can name them, and then you can say, “I choose, with God’s help, to live above these tensions. I choose, with God’s help, to trust God for the outcomes. I choose, with God’s help, to trust God for my phenomenal future. I choose, with God’s help, to live at peace, even among my tensions. This, my friends, will lessen your worries. This will give you that peaceful, easy feeling as you serenely slide through life with the help of God’s Holy Spirit. In management terminology, you’ll be up on the balcony, taking in that greater view, the systemic view, the 30,000-foot view. You’ll be
hanging with the Holy Spirit, not caught in the thicket of tensions below. I’m feeling super peaceful right now as I soak in God’s encouraging wisdom! So, my friends, let me urge you to join me above the fray. Come up here with me. God is in charge, God is Sovereign, and God is good. Since this is true, you can live in perfect peace as you place your full faith and total trust in the hands of the Lord. May you have a peaceful, tension-free, encouraging week!
Encouraged by Special Little Details

I’m encouraged by special little details! Special little details carry a massive opportunity for you and for me. I’ll tell you about the opportunities later, but first let’s look at the encouragement. I recently ordered a Leuchtturm 1917 journal for my Bible notes. I paid a bit more for this journal than my usual CR Gibson A5 size journals, but here are some of the special, finer details that jumped out and made it worth more. First, it uses 80 grams per square meter paper. My fountain pens glide over the surface. Second, the journal opens flat at any page, which is a lovely little touch. Third, the journal has page numbers so you can index your notes and refer to certain pages. Friends, I’m excited about this new Leuchtturm journal and I’ll say it again, special, little details matter. I’m curious about the little details that you appreciate. Have you been wowed by little details at a
nice hotel? Your toilet paper folded to a point, a fresh warm chocolate chip cookie at check-in, a free newspaper under your door, or maybe a piece of dark chocolate on your pillow. Little details speak loudly, “You matter! You’re important to us.” Little details speak volumes, “we’re going beyond your expectations, we want to please you, surprise you, excite you.” It’s no surprise that organizations which focus on special little details, exceeding your expectations excel, expand, and grow. Friends, little details matter. This past week I took my Toyota Prius Prime for inspection. Halfway through the inspection, while waiting in their comfortable lounge, complete with free snacks, I received a text with a link to a one-minute video. I opened the link and was delighted. The service technician gave me a one-minute visual tour of the undercarriage of my car, showed me the tire tread, brake condition, windshield condition, and overall factual tour of my Prius. I was surprised and
impressed. Little details matter. Oh, and I was in my Prius at the Veterans Administration this week, going through a drive through tent for my annual flu shot. I was using the electric engine in the car and surprised the nursing staff. One of them said, “Hey listen! You can’t hear this car! This is amazing!” That made me smile. Little details matter. Well, friends, special little details matter to God, too. In Luke 12:7, Jesus says, “Indeed the very hairs of your head are all numbered.” God knows every detail about you and loves you! In Psalm 139 we’re told that God ordained all our days before we took our first breath. Friends, little details matter to God. So now for the opportunities. Since special little details matter to you and matter to me, and since special little details matter to God, let’s think together about special little details that would exceed others’ expectations. I’m sure you could come up with oodles of creative ideas for your home, school, office, or workplace. Go ahead and
give it a try. You have my encouragement. What about thank you notes, encouraging sticky notes on computer screens, making the coffee, cleaning up the dishes, putting gas in the car, emptying the litter box, taking out the trash, and doing these without being prompted or asked. What about returning emails, texts, and phone calls within the day? What about remembering a name, noticing a new hair style, holding the door, or saying “yes maam?” Friends, as we imagine new creative innovative little details for others, we’ll not only BE encouraged, but we’ll encourage others, too. So, have an innovative and encouraging week as you focus on those special little details.
Encouraged by Asking

Have I ever told you about the powerful encouragement you get by asking? Let’s think about this for a moment. What do you ask for? Or what could you ask for? Have you asked for help in cleaning your house? Have you asked your boss for a raise? Have you asked your neighbors for a favor? Have you ever asked your spouse how you might help them out? There’s encouragement to be given and encouragement to be gained through asking. Now, you probably know this, but asking is Biblical. Jesus teaches us, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” Now the Lord didn’t mean this to be a selfish ask, but a God-centered, God-glorifying, God-reliant ask. The Lord wants us to be totally dependent on God and God’s will. The Lord wants us to be in constant
conversation and to ask for that which would further God’s purposes and glory. But how will we ever know if we’re aligned with God’s will…. unless we ask? So, here’s the thing. I’ve asked for and received many things in life. As an elementary school student, I asked to be a crossing guard, and received it. In High School, I asked for a full Air Force Scholarship to Grove City College and got it. I asked Lisa to marry me and she did. Oh, and before I asked her, I asked her father for his permission and he granted it. Oh, asking is so encouraging. I asked the Delaware Air National Guard to send me to Air Force Pilot Training and they did. I asked to be Chief of Safety for the Delaware Air National Guard and I received it. Yea, I’m not afraid to ask. I asked for a full presidential scholarship to attend Lancaster Theological Seminary and received it. Well, I also ask restaurant servers how they’re doing…. And I mean it, and they tell me. I ask people for directions rather than drive around like I
know where I’m going. I ask people for their names and then repeat them in my head a dozen times, trying to get them to stick. Oh, asking is encouraging. Encouraging to me and encouraging for others. Now there are countless more things I’ve asked for and received, but the most enduring and the most significant ask I’ve ever made … was for Jesus Christ to be my Savior! I asked Jesus Christ to forgive my sins and to be my Lord. And you might not believe it, but he said yes. He probably also said, “I’m glad you asked,” but I was so elated that he forgave me and gave me eternal life, I stopped listening. I was doing the endzone dance. Friends let me tell you – it’s radically encouraging to ask. So, let me ask you this: Will you start asking? Will you ask the Lord Jesus to forgive you and to be your Lord and Savior and then ask how you can please the Lord? Oh, one more thing. I should have been asking this at the end of my other podcasts, “Will you share this podcast with your friends? Will you give
me a 5-star rating on iTunes? Will you share the encouragement at Charliegross.com?
Thank you. Now I’ll ask you to have an encouraging week!

Charles W. Gross, Jr.
Encouraged by What’s Possible

I had a bolt of encouragement while eating lunch with my grandson Jacob today. He was eating cotton candy grapes and a peanut butter and Nutella sandwich, while I was crunching on kale, carrots, and chicken salad. I’ll share the encouragement in a second but let me give you the background. I started thinking about all the adventures Lisa and I were missing. We were planning to be in Germany at the end of September and into October. We had tickets to the “once every ten years” passion play in Oberammergau, we had planned to be in Munich for the Oktoberfest and had planned to visit some of Lisa’s distant cousins in Bavaria. But, with the Covid-19 pandemic none of that was possible. So, here’s what struck me and encouraged me. If I stay focused on what I’m missing, the adventures that were cancelled, and what I can’t do, I’ll be gloomy, glum, depressed, and miserable. I’ll be Mr.
Negative. But, if I focus on what’s possible, what I CAN do, the adventures and opportunities that are all around me right now, I’ll be upbeat, positive, pleasant, and encouraged. Friends, you know this. There are many, many twists, turns, hills, valleys, blind alleys, and detours in life. If we keep railing against the detours, the roads that are closed, and the bridges that are washed out, we’ll have a sullen, sad, miserable journey. So, I’m encouraged by what’s possible. I’m encouraged because I get to have dinner on Thursday nights with my daughter Angie and family. I get to play trains with my grandson Jacob on Fridays and then get to eat dinner with my son, Jeff, and family Friday night. I get to spend time with my wife Lisa. I get to volunteer occasionally at the Lancaster Liederkranz (the local German club), have a meal and drink a German beer. I get to ride my new recumbent trike on the Northwest Lancaster County River Trail with Lisa, and soak in God’s creation. I get to read God’s
word, ponder it, journal about it, and play
with my handsome collection of fountain
pens. I get to write podcasts in journals and
then broadcast them to the world. Do you
see where I’m going with this? My life is
chock full of adventures and opportunities.
My life is full of hope, energy, and joy. So, as
I was surfing this encouraging thought, I
turned to the life of Jesus. I don’t recall a
single comment about his regrets for what he
didn’t accomplish. I can’t think of an episode
in scripture where Jesus beat himself up for
not getting more done. Jesus didn’t wave his
hands and heal every single lame or leper.
You see, Jesus faced roadblocks, too. He
couldn’t enter some towns due to his
popularity and the pressing of the crowds, but
he didn’t pout about this, he simply moved
on. Jesus simply went about his Father’s
business, doing what was possible, loving,
touching, healing, blessing, and saving those
right in front of him. Friends do you hear it?
There’s an encouraging word in this. Don’t
Charles W. Gross, Jr.

focus on the dead ends, the roadblocks, and the setbacks, focus on what’s possible and be encouraged. The world needs you and your encouragement. Have an encouraging week with what’s possible right now.
Encouraged by Accepting Limits

We left Williamsburg, Virginia, heading toward home. I was driving west on I-64 toward Richmond. It was about 9:30 in the morning, the skies were blue and the traffic moving along nicely. The posted speed limit was 70 miles per hour, so I set my dynamic cruise control on 70. As I was daydreaming, watching my car safely follow the tractor trailer in front of me, a counter intuitive encouraging thought swept over me. Here it is: By accepting this humanly concocted limit of speed, I’m a safer driver, I’m obeying the law, and I can be encouraged to know that I’m a person of character. That sounds crazy, I know. We seldom think of limits as being encouraging, but they are. By accepting this limit, I am a socially responsible, contributing member for a greater cause. By accepting this limit, I acknowledge that life is not all about me, that life is not all about my ego, and that life is not all about what I want to do.
Accepting limits for the greater good is encouraging. Last year in the fall, Lisa and I spent three weeks driving around Germany, France, and Poland. Here’s what I noticed immediately. Most of these European drivers strictly adhere to the posted speed limits. They don’t even seem to fudge the limits a little bit, like I tend to do. I was quite inspired by their social consciousness, their social responsibility. Friends, accepting limits for the greater good is encouraging. Then my mind drifted to God’s word. This adherence to limits made me think of God’s word in Leviticus 19. The Lord says this, “When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the Lord your God.” This sentiment is repeated in Leviticus 23:22, and later in the book of Ruth, the honorable rich man, Boaz, instructs his
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... laborers to leave some stalks for the widow Ruth to glean. By creating and accepting limits, we further the life, health, safety, and prosperity for all God’s needy children. We even see Jesus, the Sovereign and Almighty Lord limit himself. At his last Passover meal, he takes off his cloak, wraps a towel around his waist, takes on the role of a servant, then stoops and serves his friends by washing their feet. He shows us what love and leadership look like by limiting himself. He even limits his life on earth by accepting the cross and dying, so we would live. So here are some questions to ponder in this encouraging word. What limits are you willing to accept to build better relationships? What limits are your willing to accept to enhance the safety, health, and prosperity of others? Are you willing to drive the speed limit? Are you willing to limit your impatience? Are you willing to limit your material consumption and then give generously out of your abundance? Friends, as we think about
limits, we can live and move and love in far greater ways, by accepting limits. Have a wonderfully encouraging week..... in a limited sort of way.
Encouraged by My RPG

Today my daily Bible reading included 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. This is a great chapter of scripture, but what jumped out at me and gave me a bountiful boost of encouragement was the passage at verses 16-18. It says this, “Rejoice always, pray continuously, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Jesus Christ.” So, if you look at the verbs in this passage, we’re told to rejoice, pray and give thanks. Rejoice, pray, and give thanks, or RPG for short. Now in military lingo, an RPG is a rocket-propelled grenade, a shoulder fired weapon directed toward tanks, trucks, or light armored vehicles. Now here’s more than you asked for, but the urbandictionary.com says that RPG is really an acronym for a Russian term beginning with the letters, RPG, meaning a handheld anti-tank grenade launcher. Either way, for me, rejoicing, praying and giving thanks – my
RPG, is a very effective, powerful, personal weapon against the attacks of negativity, naysaying, darkness, depression, and other lethal black holes in my pace through space, seeking to suck the savory life out of me. Yea, my RPG is a powerful, personal weapon, but notice the modifiers used with rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks. The modifiers are, “always, continuously, and in all circumstances.” You get it? All the time. In other words, this personal RPG weapon of encouragement is to be carried and used daily, yes, every day. It’s part of our makeup. It’s like putting on deodorant. It’s part of our personal protective equipment. It’s part of who we are. And in this Covid-19 year of 2020, just as we don’t leave home without our keys, our wallets, and our masks, we shouldn’t leave home without our RPGs. We should be always, continuously, and continually rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks. When we carry our RPGs, we are an army of one – or more accurately, we LOOK
like an army of one, but since Jesus Christ says, “I will be with you always, even to the end of the age,” we go nowhere alone! We’re bulletproof, we’re spiritually invincible. Isn’t that encouraging? A few verses earlier Paul and his accomplices Silas and Timothy write this, “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” Friends, when we use our RPGs daily, when we rejoice, pray, and give thanks, we will indeed encourage others, build each other up, and make encouragement go viral. Will you join me? Will you whip out your RPGs and help crush the darkness, the hate, the divisions, and the walls of hostility? Rejoice always, pray continuously, and give thanks in all circumstances, for the Lord goes with us, the Lord goes before us, the Lord goes behind us, and the Lord goes above us, and that my friends, is outrageously encouraging. So have an encouraging week with your RPG!
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Rejoice, pray, and give thanks all day, every day, in every way.
Encouraged by Wrestling

I woke up at 2:30am! Ugh! It wasn’t time to get up! Not even close. My body needed more sleep! I love my seven and a half or eight hours of sleep. But today, my brain woke up early and I started wrestling with thoughts, ideas, things to do, and projects. I was wrestling with the title of my second book of encouragement, the one that will include this episode. I was wrestling with ways to help Wrightsville Presbyterian Church. I was even wrestling with an unanswered email. Then, just like me, in my wrestling, I started to think about wrestling. Yea, I was wrestling with wrestling. I was searching for ways to reframe my thinking, tossing, turning, and wrestling in a positive way rather than in the “Are you kidding me? This is crazy. I’m losing sleep,” sort of way. That’s when the light went on, my brain cells lit up, I got out of bed, and started my day. You see, that’s when I remembered the Biblical story of
Jacob wrestling with God. Jacob stayed in the struggle. Jacob wouldn’t give up. Jacob wouldn’t roll over. Jacob wouldn’t throw in the towel. Jacob stayed in the tension with a man, an angel, with God, and in that struggle was blessed and given the name Israel, which means, struggles with God. So, this revelation is what literally made my day when I finally got up at 4am. I knew I was being encouraged to enjoy this sweet spot of time. Get up at 4am, while the house is dark and quiet, and continue to wrestle with God, rely on God, lean on God, and trust God for all life’s necessities. By staying in the wrestle, by staying in the relationship, God will empower me to answer emails, help the church where I can, write a podcast, and even find the right title for my next book. I just need to stay the course, stay connected, stay in the tension, enjoy the friction, and learn from the Sovereign, Holy, Almighty One. The One who loves, loves, loves me. The One who fills me, strengthens me, and helps me grow,
serve, love, and contribute. Now you may know the question that’s on the tip of my fountain pen..... Where are you struggling and how are you struggling? Are you racking your brain, going it alone, relying on mere human wisdom and strength? Or are you struggling with God and relying on your creator, your Savior, your beloved to bless you, give you strength and help you along your path? Friends let me encourage you to opt for the latter. Let me encourage you to be encouraged in your wrestling! When you stay in the struggle, stay in the tension, stay in the relationship, and stay connected to God, you will be so richly and extravagantly blessed and rewarded! You’ll have no words, but praise be to the God of glory! So, now, go and have a fine phenomenal week with the Lord as you wrestle!
Encouraged by the Smell of Coffee

After seventeen years in our home, we’re getting new quartz kitchen counter tops. It’s time for an upgrade. But, like any change, there is a process to it. The first step in our kitchen upgrade process is getting the current counter tops templated and measured. For this to happen, we had to clear off all our countertop stuff. For me, this involved moving my Capresso espresso maker and my Mr. Coffee. I moved them into my office and started making coffee. You know what happened? I loved my office even more. You see, I love the smell of coffee and with coffee makers now in my smaller space, it felt more like a café. Now, while working in my office, I feel like I’m working at Starbucks or Dunkin or in a quaint cozy café. For some reason, the smell of coffee stimulates my attitude, my brain, my imagination, my senses, and gives me a happy feeling. Maybe your olfactory sense does something like that.
too. When friends of ours were selling their house, their real estate agent encouraged them to cook a turkey on the days of showings. The smell of a turkey in the oven would make the home more appealing. Your senses trigger memories and other images. You might have a similar sensation when you smell salt water, apple pie, French fries, or even when you hear a certain song. You remember the place, the friends, and the situation when you first encountered the smell or heard the tune. You recall that special date, her perfume, or his kiss. You see, by God’s masterful design, our senses are interconnected. When one sense is stimulated, another one is triggered. I smell the coffee aroma in my office and pleasant memories come to mind. I think of that autumn afternoon in Heidelberg Germany, where I enjoyed strong coffee in the square, and imagined myself as a famous philosopher. Or I smell that wonderful coffee aroma and I think of those afternoons at
Starbucks journaling sermon notes with my Mont Blanc fountain pen. Am I crazy or does that happen to you? You stimulate your nose, or your ears and associated memories are dragged out of your mental closet. In a similar fashion, during the Jewish Passover, typical elements of a meal are used to recall the slavery in Egypt and the glorious release by God. Bitter herbs represent the bitterness of slavery, salt recalls their many tears, unleavened bread represents the haste of their packing and leaving. The Passover lamb is eaten as a symbol of their sacrifice to God. All these ordinary elements of a meal are used to stimulate the memories of God’s faithfulness, God’s presence, and God’s favor for his people. A simple meal links beautiful memories of liberation, freedom, and release from captivity. Now, my friends, for the greatest news you’ll ever hear. When Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with his friends, he too used ordinary elements to show his role in giving us life. As the Passover lamb
himself, he broke bread and said, “This is my body broken for you.” He poured a cup of wine and said, “This is the new covenant in my blood.” Eat and drink these in memory of me! Let the smell, the taste, the hearing of the pouring wine, remind you of your Savior’s sacrifice that gives you life. Friends, enjoy your senses, be encouraged by your imagination, and let the reminder of the Lord’s sacrifice give you an encouraging week!
Encouraged by Another Way

Today I was encouraged by the concept of “another way.” Simple, right? Encouraged by another way. You probably heard it stated, “there’s more than one way to skin a cat,” which is an old proverb, but I don’t know, I’ve never skinned one and don’t plan on it. I hope you don’t either. Anyway, let me explain why I’m encouraged by “another way.” Lisa was signed up for a webinar through the Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society. As she struggled to sign into the webinar, there seemed to be no way to get in. We clicked, we googled, we searched, we came up with nothing. Usually there’s a link or a URL with sign-in instructions. Neither were to be found. It looked like a lost opportunity and a waste of the registration fee. Was there another way? She called the contact number and discovered that their email link had gone straight into her junk mail. By this time, the webinar had wrapped
up and they had it recorded for later viewing. She was able to enjoy the webinar another way, in her personal leisure. That’s encouraging isn’t it? There was another way. Kinda reinforces that encouraging mantra, “try, try again.” There’s probably another way. I have another story like this. You may have heard it before. I wanted to go to Air Force pilot training and even was lucky enough to have an Air Force scholarship to Grove City College. But, because of the timing of my graduation in 1975, I was unable to attend. The Air Force didn’t need more pilots. So, I entered the Air Force as a Titan II Missile Launch Officer and tried and tried to go to pilot training but was denied and denied. After three years of various attempts, I entered Air Force pilot training by another way. Not as an Air Force officer, but as a Delaware Air National Guard officer. That my friends is super encouraging. I got to Air Force pilot training by another way. Now let me ratchet up the importance of this
encouragement. The Lord Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth, the one who made you, shaped you, and gives you commandments to live by, knows you intimately and completely. The Lord knows full well we can’t perfectly follow his commandments. No matter how hard we try, we stumble, we fall, we fail, and we cry. We need another way. We can’t please God or enter life abundant or life eternal on our own merits or by our own works. We need another way. God knows this. So, God the All-wise Father, sent His Son, Jesus Christ to give us another way. Jesus Christ, full of grace and truth, came to earth as one of us. He faced the same trials and tribulations as we do but followed his Father’s commands perfectly. Then, as one of us, as if he were a law breaker, he was condemned and crucified. He took our place, died the death we deserve, to give us life another way. Do you see why I’m encouraged by another way? Friends, let me encourage you first to accept
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God’s offer to give you life, “another way,” then my friends, keep at it, try, try again, for there’s always another way. Have yourself an encouraging week, maybe in another way!
Encouragement in Waiting

Waiting, waiting, waiting. We all wait. We all know what it’s like to wait. We wait for a check in the mail. We wait for a teenager to come home from a date. We wait for vacation. We wait to be seen in the emergency room. We wait in lines on Black Friday, then we wait in the return line after Christmas. Yea, we all know what it’s like to wait. Waiting can be difficult, demoralizing and even excruciating. In Omar Mohamed’s book, “When Stars are Scattered,” he defines life in a Kenyan refugee camp by “waiting.” Waiting for water, waiting for food, waiting for hope, waiting for freedom, waiting for news from the United Nations, waiting for release from the prison atmosphere of the camp, .... And, waiting while hungry, waiting while feeling hopeless and waiting while sleeping on a dirt floor. Omar waited for years and years and it nearly drove him crazy. So, yea, even those of us NOT in a refugee camp
camp, we all know what it’s like to wait. Think about your life right now. What are you eagerly waiting for? A job? Love? A relationship? A spouse? A degree? A career opportunity? A raise? Forgiveness? Maybe a second chance? A diagnosis? In many ways, we’re all in this together, for we all wait. So, where do we find encouragement in waiting? Can there be encouragement in waiting? As I thought about Omar’s excruciating wait and our times of waiting, I found a common thread, a common denominator. Hope and encouragement in waiting comes when we “wait for the Lord” to act. Encouragement is found when we wait confidently for the Holy Spirit’s power. Encouragement comes to us when we wait boldly and expectantly for the power of God to act in our lives. We’re encouraged when we hold onto the Lord in faith, trust and tenacity. When we hold on, even when we’re groping in the dark or driving through life in the fog. Omar found encouragement while waiting on God to act.
So, friends, encouragement in waiting comes through fully trusting and relying on God’s Word. Listen to God’s Word and be encouraged while you wait. Psalm 27:14 says, “Wait for the Lord, be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.” Isaiah 40:31 says, “… those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint.” In Acts 1:4, Jesus tells his disciples, “Do not leave Jerusalem but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” And finally, in Micah, it says, “But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me.” Do you see it, friends? We all wait and spend pieces of our lives waiting, but we can find hope and encouragement when we wait with eager expectation for the Lord and for the Lord’s goodness. Omar’s UN
appointed foster mother would end almost every conversation with him with this: “Everything’s going to be ok.” Everything is going to be ok. And you know what? She was right. Omar has a college degree, is doing social work, is happily married, has 5 children and lives in Lancaster, PA. When you wait for the Lord and wait on the Lord’s timing, everything will be ok. So, have an encouraging week while you wait.... As you wait on the Lord.
Charles W. Gross, Jr.

About the author

Charlie grew up near Lancaster, PA. He married his high school sweetheart, Lisa in 1973 and have three grown children and six grandchildren. Charlie went to Grove City College, Webster University, Goldey Beacom College, and Lancaster Theological Seminary. He was a Titan II Missile Combat Crew Commander in the U.S. Air Force, then attended pilot training and flew C-130s for twenty years. He retired in 1999 as a Lt Col in the Delaware Air National Guard. He entered the ministry in 1999, serving in various executive ministry positions before being called to pastor the West Grove Presbyterian Church. He retired in August 2019. Charlie loves travel, photography, journaling, podcasting, and spending time with his family. His podcasts are available on Apple Podcasts. A link is available at http://charliegross.com