Hebrews 10:25

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Preacher: Donald Macleod

[0:00] Let us turn now to Hebrews chapter 10 and verse 25.! Hebrews chapter 10 and verse 25.

I want to focus on those words this morning because they bring before us one of the great themes of the New Testament, the theme of encouragement.
Because the words mean actually but encouraging one another, almost comforting one another.
Remind us that the New Testament shows a great and consistent concern to emphasize the need for all of us to engage in this kind of activity.
And I am conscious as I bring out this idea that the Church of God often shows a very opposite tendency.
[1:49] We tend to mention that if we want something done, if we want some kind of improvement, if we want some kind of action, we imagine that we secure those things by words of warning, by words of correction, of admonition, of rebuke.

By telling people where they are going wrong. And I think that in the Church of God today, there is a tremendous volume of sheer discouragement.
A great volume of criticism, of judgment. There are so many words spoken with a view to causing pain.
With a view to putting people dull. With a view to putting people dull. With a view to inducing some kind of humility in case people may find themselves walking too tall.
The result is that so many of God's people are simply giving up. And far too many of them are even cracking up.
[3:17] There are so many who have become marginalized. Not because they have nothing to offer. But because they can't find access for their contribution.

Or because as they endeavored to serve. They met with so much discouragement. And so now they are simply passengers in the Church of God.
They make no contribution because they found if they did make some contribution. Then they brought upon themselves only pain and rebuke and criticism.
And so they are non-contributors in the Church of God. Indeed, I wonder very often if we don't merit the Viking description.
That the Churches are simply groups of people. Contributing to one another's destruction. And yet, when we turn to the New Testament.
[4:32] We find a very, very different picture. We find there a tremendous emphasis upon a ministry of encouragement.

And you find that at so many levels of New Testament teaching. You take for example this Epistle itself.
What is it? Well the writer says, it is a word of encouragement. Suffering says, the word of exhortation.
Suffering a word of encouragement. This man saw many of those who professed the Lord's name. He saw them falling by the wayside. He saw them wilting. He saw them folding up. He saw them becoming, as I said, marginalized.
[5:30] And what does he do? Well he writes this Epistle to encourage them. And you may say to me, but this Epistle is full of theology.

It's all full of Christ and the Atonement. And those mighty and profound affirmations. About the incarnation and cross of the Lord Jesus.
Well quite so. That all these things were given by the writer. As a means of encouragement. Hold fast he says.

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And cling to your confession. Well why should we? Because he says, we have a great high priest. And so he tells them all this doctrine, all this truth.
In order to the encouragement. Because he knows that only as they know and grasp and believe and even feel the truth. Only so will they keep on going.
[6:29] And so all the theology is in order to that encouragement. Or you take him out like Barnabas.

He was a son of consolation. He was a son of encouragement. He was much as besides a great pastor. A great church planter.
But above all he was a son of encouragement. He had this great gift, this charisma that God had given to him. And through this gift, wherever he went.
And that this man was able to spread enthusiasm and courage. And to make people feel they could cope. And they could pursue, they could achieve great things for God.
He had that input upon them. Now it wasn't simply in my view a matter of charisma. We know that Barnabas worked at this.
[7:28] We know that he taught. He exalted. We know that he was a good man. He did good. He was a man full of faith. A man full of the Holy Spirit.

But there he was primarily a man who because he was close to God. A man because he had this charisma. He was a son of encouragement.
And everywhere he went, people suddenly felt better. And they felt they could cope. And what a great vision that is today for you and for me.
You may be sitting in this church this very moment thinking of all the things that are wrong with you. You may look at even the preacher himself and you may feel well, he should do this and do that. Or many of the details as well. And you've got all those rebukes and amonitions. You have them all inside. Well where Barnabas went, his concern was to ask himself, how can I do good to these people?
[8:31] How can I make them feel strong and make them feel courageous and make them feel able to cope? Well you go beyond that.

You remember the Holy Spirit. And you remember his great role in the Church of God and his great designation. He is the Comforter.
He is the great Paraclete. The great Encourager of the people of God. He was sent into this world on this great mission to fill the people of God with courage.
Now he does it of course in some ways by his own mysterious influence on our own human hearts and spirit in his own secret way.
But he does it again I'm sure by showing us the greatness and the grandeur and the compassion of trust. He shall take the things that are mine.
[9:33] I suppose that fundamentally he does it by showing us, by telling us about Jesus. And I'm sure in many ways that's a large part of our problem.

That in so many of our gatherings and our interruption our concern is not to share Jesus with one another.
And to point each other to the glory and to the greatness of the Savior. But that was the Spirit specific of it.
Of course the Spirit will convict of sin. Of course the Spirit sometimes makes us feel so small and makes us feel so vile.
I don't dispute that for a moment. But his great and his predominant concern was and is to fill God's people with fortitude.
[10:32] So that they could look at their responsibilities and their burdens and their duties and they would feel, oh we can cope. They could look at some great pain. They could look at some great pain.

They could go through pain. They could go through temptation. Because he filled them with courage.
He made them feel they could handle it. He made them feel that they could cope. You know, he sent the apostles and all those impossible missions in the New Testament.
He sent them to Galatia. He sent them to Corinth, to Ephesus, to Athens itself, to Rome. And to all those impossible situations. And he sent them in with courage.

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And surely there is a great model for us. That our concern should be to minister to each other exactly as God's Spirit ministers to ourselves.
[11:38] And so we might say that this whole epistle is a tribute to the importance of encouragement. We might say that men like Barnabas are great pointers to the importance of encouragement.

We might say that the Holy Spirit's work is a great pointer to encouragement. But there is something even more in this.
It is that God the Father himself, that he at last, is the great model of encouragement.
There is nothing I love to ponder more than the way that God the Father ministered to God the Son. During the years of the Lord's humiliation on earth.
Our Lord's life was filled with crisis. And yet, at almost every point of crisis, God the Father moves in to speak the word of encouragement.
[12:52] And to hold the Saviour's hand. We see it at the baptism itself. When the Lord begins his ministry. There comes a voice from heaven and it says, This is my beloved Son.

I am well pleased. The Lord facing awesome responsibilities. The Lord trembling in the consciousness of his human frailty.
The Lord in great trepidation. And the voice comes. And the voice says, Son, you're my Son.
I love you. And I love what you're doing. And that was spoken as a word of encouragement.
I find the same thing in the transfiguration of Christ on the very threshold of Calvary. Because that episode is only days before the cross.
[13:59] And as the Lord moves into the shadow. And into the gathering's darkness. And the gathering's storm. There comes again the voice that says, Son, I love you.

And I'm well pleased. We find it in the garden of Gethsemane. There appears an angel to strengthen him.
Is it not a great thing that the persons of the Godhead should so minister to one another?
I believe I am justified in saying that the pattern of the earthly ministry is only a manifestation of a more profound reality in the very depths of God.
That the persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit live toward one another. And live for one another.
[15:15] And you may say to me, Ah, but there is no need in the depths of Godhead. There is no need in the life of the Trinity. And I say no, there is no need because each ministers so tenderly and so effectively to the other.

That there is never any suspending of the love. There is never any hiatus in the consolation. Because the persons live towards, live in, live for, live through.
They live penetratively the one of the other. And I wish that the Church of God could learn the lessons of that great fact.
That each one of us might so minister to each other. That each congregation of our denomination would so minister to others.
And that each denomination of God's people. And each age of God's Church would minister in the same way to one another.
[16:37] I remember the words of the Apostle Paul to the Church of Corinth. That we may comfort others. That we may encourage others.

With the encouragement with which God encourages ourselves. How marvelous it is this ministry of God the Father.
To His incarnate eternal Son. And how moving it is this ministry of God the Father. To His adopted children.
How often, if it is not to try to put it this way. God pats us on the head. And God says to us, I love you.
And I love what you're doing. Well so far, I've sought only to show the importance of this dimension of New Testament teaching.
[17:39] That we live to encourage one another. But suppose it's so. Then, how do we go about it? And what does it involve?

Well I think the fundamental principle is given to us in verse 24 of this chapter of Hebrews. Where we read these words. Let us consider one another.
Let's consider one another. Let us break out of the bondage of self-centeredness.

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And the bondage of inwardness. And let's adopt as our goal that we shall minister to others. We are born involuted and introverted.
We are born with profound and powerful feelings of our own need to be loved. And our own need to be cared for.
[18:43] And all of us need to want someone stronger than ourselves. That we can lean upon. That is perfectly natural.

And here we are told that we must change the aim. And change the focus. And we must instead consider one another.
We must perceive one another. Be aware of where others are. And aware of what their needs are. And in some ways the whole possibility of encouragement comes out of this simple and yet great and also terrible fact.
That we are to live in the consciousness of the needs of others. We learn that behind every facade of strength, of invulnerability.
[19:50] Behind every closed door. Behind many a smile. may of those whose spirits are broken.

Have we that level of sensitiveness, that level of awareness, considering one another? Do we know where other people are on the road?
And sometimes it is so painful because our Lord needs are so powerfully present to our own minds, our own needs, so acute.
And there are days when we might argue with God and say, Lord, but it's I who need the comfort. It's I who need the encouragement.
And yet God is saying, look, get up, encourage the needs of others, consider. One another. And maybe at the end of the day, the difficulty finds its resolution in the great words of our Lord, that he who loses his life shall find it.
[21:40] The great mystery that we find our fulfillment through kenosis and through self-denial. It has been, in my view, one of the great problems of our whole tradition that we have been so acutely aware of our own spiritual needs, or the pressure to make your own calling and your own election sure, that we have been crippled in the area of ministry to others.

We have even been so acutely conscious of our unfitness to minister and even of our unworthiness to minister. And we've said to God, Lord, I'm not fit to comfort that person.
I'm not worthy to encourage other people. And we built this great cozy cocoon around ourselves, defending ourselves behind the profession of weakness, the profession of unworthiness, the profession of our own need.
And God is saying to me, no, I look, look, I know you're sore. I know you're bleeding inside, maybe worse than anybody else here is this morning.
And yet, I want you to go and to encourage these people. I want you to go meet their need. I want you to go build them up.
[23:17] And if we say, but me, Lord, what about me? The Lord can only say to us, I am you, shepherd. And you lead you to me.

We begin by considering one another, by awareness of need and by commitment to ministry, not to ourselves, but to others.
And that's then our primary concern. How then do we go on to apply in detail this great concept that God is trying to give me this morning, this whole ministry of encouragement?
If I'm aware of others, then what do I do for them? I want to begin with a negative. I want to begin with a negative. The great importance that we should watch what we say.

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it's our lips, it's our lips, our tongues, our speech, that does so much of the damage. The cruel word, the unkind word, the put-down word, the word that damns with faint praise.
[24:33] It isn't only you know what you say, but why you say it. You know why you made that clever remark. You know why you told that story.

You know why you made that comment. You know why you put that particular barb in. And there she'll believe her, your brother. She's gone away.
Your sister in Christ, she's gone away and she's bleeding inside because of what you've done. And the glow, the comfort with which she came to church this morning, that glows down.
And inside now, it's all hurt just because of one word. The apostle Paul tells the church in Ephesus, let no evil or filthy communication come out of your mouth.
But only what's good to the use of edifying. What a tremendous challenge that is. What a challenge to us, to those who articulate, to those of us who are glib, who are fast and very tongues and quick wits.
[25:47] They need to put the brakes on, to learn to be willing to look foolish rather than make the clever retort. Because the Lord is saying to us this morning, don't let a single word come out, but a word which builds up the person who hears it.

That it may minister grace to the hearers. You know, it's a magnificent thing. It's the most moving thing possible that every word you speak should be a gift to the person who hears it.
That it may minister grace. Let every word you say be a gift to the person who hears it. That's the most fundamental principle and encouragement.
And not to speak the discouraging words, but so to live that people will say, not to you, I hope, but about you eventually.
You know, every word she said was a gift. Every word was so precious. Not a single evil word, not a single filthy word, not a single discouraging word, but every word built up, every word so gracious, every word was a gift from God.
[27:11] That's what God wants us to be. Again, it means this. It means truly a need often for us to engage in a ministry of consolation.

First of all, I'm saying, hold your tongues. Secondly, I'm saying, there is such a need in the church of God for a ministry of consolation.
Not confined to ministers and elders and pastors and trained counselors, but our responsibility we have every single one of us to every other member of the body of Jesus Christ.
I can't emphasize to us strongly again this terrible, terrible fact that everyone in here is bleeding. everyone in here hurts or will hurt sometime or other.
And we are called upon by God to speak the word of comfort, the word that soothes, the word that consoles, the word that binds up the brokenhearted.
[28:18] there are some and they're broken in bereavement. And maybe, you know, very often what happens is that there is an instant rush of consolation in the early days when psychologically it is least needed, although still very important.

And then when the shock is over, the mind is working and the need for consolation is most acute, then very often the consolation is not there.
when the mind is looking for answers, the mind is asking questions, the mind is full of remorse and full of guilt. And the mind is looking for comfort.
You remember how Paul dealt with the church of Thessalonica in their sorrow. He moved in and he said, comfort one another. And he said to them again, you know, comfort one another with these words, words, words, words, such beautiful words, God's words for the grieved.
And God's word for the burdened conscience. God's word for the guilty. God's word for that person whose whole life today is dominated by the recollection of one sin, one past sin, one present sin.
[29:45] God's consolation for the feeble-minded. God's consolation for those who feel useless in his service. God's consolation for those who feel that their gifts are so limited and their contribution so small.

God's comfort for those who have problems that they cannot admit and can't confess and can't put words to. And are we there in that vast range of human experiences for which there is for which there is no earthly comfort?
We are all of us, said C.S. Lewis, under the harrow. We are all of us under the harrow.

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Reality looked at steadily is unbearable. Now these were words written in the shadow of great personal loss and great personal grief.
And yet they're words that are constantly relevant. Your neighbor beside you there, she's under the harrow. And for her, reality is unbearable, maybe.
[31:04] the need for consolation. Before you move in with your angry and clever word, just remind yourself, you know, that heart you're speaking to, it may be broken.

It may be right at the edge, right at the limits of its own endurance. And your word may be the word that pushes it over.
Let's watch what we say. Let's exercise a ministry of consolation. Let's make it our concern to build up each other's self-esteem.
Terrible, terrible teaching, you may say. Didn't Augustine, after all, tell us that humility was the very essence of Christianity?
and is it not right, therefore, that we should make it our concern to keep each other humble? Isn't it right that the congregation should keep its minister humble?
[32:19] That he should keep the elders humble? That the old should keep the young humble? the unlearned keep the learned humble? And every one of us keep every one of us humble, humble, humble, humble, until we're all vile in our own eyes.

And there's no one left with the moral fiber to engage in a ministry of encouragement. I'm not going to enter the launching of it.
How I can reconcile building up self-esteem with the imperatives of humility. I'm going to do something more simple, go back to the New Testament itself, and show you how the great masters of the spiritual life, how they built up self-esteem.
You know, the Lord Jesus Christ said to his disciples, you know, what kind of men they were. They were unlearned men, inexperienced men, men with no great depth or strength of character, every single one of them dramatically and obviously flawed men.
And the Lord said to them, you know, he said, you're the salt of the earth, you're the light of the world. They must have blushed.
[33:56] And when the days came and they forsook him and they denied him and they fled, they often wonder, did they recall how he said to them, they were the salt of the earth?

He didn't say to himself, I mustn't make them big-headed. He didn't say I must keep them humble. No, in his view they were the salt of the earth.
In his view they were the light of the world. In his view they were the whole hope of humanity. And he didn't mind telling them, and he didn't mind them knowing, because it was the truth.
And so he told them. when did you last tell someone you were the salt of the earth? I remember the apostle Paul who writes those magnificent epistles to very strange churches full of faults, and all that will begin with thanksgiving.
Tells them, I thank you every time I pray. I praise God for you. And I tell God about your faith in Christ, your love for the saints.
[35:21] I praise him for your gifts. He tells that church Philip, I thanks for your fellowship in the gospel. Thanks for all your gifts.

Thanks for all your love, and thanks for all your sympathy. You know, he says, when I look at what you've done for Christ and done for me, I know God's begun a good work in you.
I know it, and I praise God for you because you're so lovely. He's building up their self esteem. That's what God the Father did to God the Son.
I love you. I love what you're doing. You remember how different was the Saul of Tarsus after his conversion, how that man came into the church of God in Acts chapter 9 and the church of God said, look, please, don't bring that man here.
That man's a persecutor, that man's conversion can't be genuine. We don't believe that anybody who did what he did could ever be saved.
[36:44] But remember Barnabas, the son of consolation, he said, look, I've heard a story. I believe a story.

I've heard him preach. I know he's God's man. I'm standing by him. I'm sponsoring him and you take him in. Are there some in our churches today that they're marginalized?
You know, I still hear folk talk in the free church of outsiders. How in God's name are they in Christ and outsiders?

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They need someone to bring them in from the cold, to stand by them as Paul stood by Barnabas and build up their self-esteem.
you know, in many ways, Paul was a greater man than Barnabas. And Paul would do so much and accomplish so much more than Barnabas was ever destined to accomplish.
[38:04] And yet, you know, without Barnabas, Paul wouldn't even have got started. The greater man owed it all to the lesser man.

That's often the case in the kingdom of God. Who's to know the church of God when a young convert comes with a dubious pedigree and a strange story?
He may be God's man, same as Paul was, same as many a man from such a background walls.
And if we minister as lesser men, we have no idea who we're ministering to.
So I'm saying, let's watch what we say, let's console, let's build up self-esteem, let's provoke to love and to good works, as we're told here, let's stimulate, let's induce almost this paroxysm.
I have this idea in my head of applying an electric charge to some inert organism and suddenly it starts, it startles.
[39:28] That's Paul's image here, a paroxysm, a convulse people. You know, as I rush through this, someone in the free church, someone here has a good idea.

Immediately there are gallons, tons of the coldest water poured upon it. Stimulate. Stimulate ideas. Stimulate perseverance in ideas. Yes, it can be done. It's worth trying. Let's find the resources. let's keep on stimulating to love.
Paroxysms of love convulse each other into spiritual stamina, perseverance into love, into good works, into accomplishing something beautiful for God.
Stimulate. That's what we're here for. Or again, let me just put it to you this way. Isn't it marvelous the contrast that we have here, not forsaking the assembling, but encouraging one another, exhorting, encouraging.
[40:42] You know, if I were to be provocative, I don't believe that these early Christians met for what we call simply public worship.

church, I don't even believe that that was their primary concern. Their meetings were for mutual ministry.
They met to encourage one another. And you know, their whole service, everything they did as they listened to the preaching of the word, and as they sat at the Lord's Supper, and as they prayed together, all these things had one great overriding concern, to encourage each other.
I have suggested sometimes, and I repeat it, that we might well announce on this port of occasion at least, that the evening encouragement will be held at 6.30, because that's what they were supposed to be doing.
these services were meant to be stimuli, to be electrical charges, inducing convulsive commitment to love and to good works.
[42:01] People were meant to leave these, feeling they could cope, they could do anything that God wanted them to do. Let's watch what we say, let's engage in a ministry of consolation, let's build up one another's self-esteem, let us stimulate one another, and I'll close on this, let us quite literally exhort one another.

Well, what do I mean by that? Well, I mean this, let us confront one another with the great doctrines, because in those great doctrines, there is such a tremendous amount of encouragement.
Let me put it to you this way, I've spoken of Barnabas as a son of encouragement, and one day, Barnabas was sent to Antioch, because there was a new work at Antioch, and he wanted to encourage those young and those new believers.
Do you know what he did to them? He taught them. Barnabas and you know, it's a beautiful thing, Barnabas decided that they needed real teaching, they needed the best teaching.
He wanted to encourage them. He said to himself, the way to encourage them is through teaching, and he said, I'll get them the best teacher in the world, and you know what he did?
[43:38] he sent for Saul of Tarshish, and for a whole year, Saul of Tarshish taught the people. That's what Barnabas thought.

They need encouragement. Teaching is the encouragement. I'll get them the best teacher I know, I'll send for Paul, and Paul came, and Paul gave them consolation.
Do you remember Romans chapter 12? You have it in your authorized versions in this form, I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God.

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Well, I prefer it this way. I encourage you, brethren, by the mercies of God. That's in Romans 12. You know, he has spent 11 magnificent, incomparable chapters describing the mercy of God, speaking of God's love and God's grace in the gift of his own son, speaking of election and justification and union with Christ and of glory to come and of the love that will never let us go. And you know, he worked himself up into such a tremendous favor that he concludes at chapter 11 that great outburst of doxology, all the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God, his own doctrine, all the depth, he said.
[45:08] And he moves on to say, I encourage you by the mercies of God. Those great things that God has done, these today are our encouragement.

That's what we have in Hebrews, encouragement by the presentation of Jesus Christ. I believe that in many ways our lives as Christians are so attenuated and so lacking the heavenly and the luminous and the otherworldly and the spiritual and the powerful because we aren't in living vital communion with the great truths, with the mercies of God.
I encourage you by the mercies of God. God, let us live beside the manger at Bethlehem. Let's live at the Mount of Transfiguration.
Let's live at the cross of Calvary. Let's live at the empty tomb. Let's live at Pentecost. Let's live at the throne of judgment.
Let's live at God's right hand. I beseech you, I encourage you by the truths of God. That at last is where the consolation is going to come from.
[46:29] I close with that. Remember, there's a great hymn that puts it for us this way. And when I think that God his son not sparing gave him to die, I scarce can take it in that on that cross my burden gladly bearing, he bled and died to take away my sin.

Then sings my soul, almighty God, to thee, how great thou art, how great thou art.
My soul shall sing throughout eternity, how great thou art, how great thou art. let's find our encouragement at last there, that God is great and that being great he has loved us and accepted us.
May he bless his word, shall we pray. O Lord, bless thy word to us, meet us in our need, give us strength, give us courage, patience and grace to hang on, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen. Amen. Thank you.

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