

- Who's ready for an encouraging word from God today? With so much negativity, so much hard news, I'm so thankful for God's Word that is living and active to speak to us today. Would you pray with me? Father, thank you for every person watching, every person at Church Online, every person in a building. We pray, God, that Your living, inspired Word would build our faith, encourage our hearts, God, to be Your church, shining Your light, lifting Your truth, and loving people toward Jesus. We pray this in His name. And everybody said, amen.

- [Congregation] Amen.

- I don't know if you've noticed it or not, but everyone that you come across is facing some type of battle in their life. Just about everybody that you encounter is often going through something that may not be obvious from the outside, but they're facing a battle on the inside. It's a lot like a guy named Scott that I met years ago. Scott was one of the nicest, most easy-going guys that I'd ever come across and that's why I was completely shocked when we were having a private conversation in my office that Scott told me that he had concluded that it was best for him to take his life. He went on to tell me about the ongoing anxiety that he felt, the depression that he fought, and that he was just tired of being alone and hurting and he thought the best solution would be for him to take his life. I was a very young pastor, wasn't experienced in this type of situation, so I immediately just kind of prayed a shotgun prayer to God like, "God, just help me. "Give me the words to say, I don't know what to say. "God, help me in this moment." And at that moment, I felt like I was prompted by God to do something that I've only done one time, only in that situation, never before and never again. But at that moment, I just looked at Scott and saw so many good things about him and I took out a notepad and I said, "I believe you're supposed to give me 100 reasons." Somebody say, "100 reasons."

- [Congregation] 100 reasons.

- Just type that in the chat. A hundred reasons why your life matters. A hundred reasons why you should live. A hundred reasons to be encouraged. "Give me some reasons and I'm gonna write them down." And he just looked at me hopeless; he said, "There's no reason. "I can't think of a single one." I said, "No, tell me something good about yourself." And he said, he kind of , "Well, I'm a pretty good writer." And he was a very good writer. So I wrote it down, "You are a good writer. "So tell me something else." He looked at me kinda just deadpanned and he said, "I'm funny." And I thought, "I've never noticed that before, "but since you're in this state, "I'm not gonna argue with you. "Yeah, you're funny." I said, "Give me somethin' else." He said, "I look a lot like Robert Redford." He didn't look anything like Robert Redford. I said, "Oh, you are funny!" and I wrote that down. "You look like Robert Redford." And about on number seven or eight, he started to kind of have a little bit of a breakthrough. Instead of feeling heavy and like there was no reason to live, he started to kind of almost smile and started givin' me more reasons. He said, "Well, my sister says that I'm really faithful. "My boss says that I'm a really, really hard worker." He pulled out some random ones. He said, "I still have very full head of hair" and stuff like that. And before long when we hit about 20, 22, 25, he just started crying and saying thing after thing, reason after reason of why his life was valuable and why he should be encouraged enough to go on. We listed 100 reasons on the front and the back of a yellow notepad and then we prayed and I asked God to put these reasons on his heart that he would know that he could be encouraged by a God who was with him and a God who loves him and a God who has given him so many reasons to live. And I folded up the little piece of paper and I gave it to him and I believe that God was

gonna do something special. I lost track of Scott. I end up starting Life.Church in the year 1996, it was probably four or five years after starting Life.Church that I got through preaching one time and I looked out and, lo and behold, Scott, who had moved away, came back to church to say hello. This time he wasn't alone, he had his new wife and a little son walking with him and when I saw him, man, we just liked hugged, like the old days. Remember when you could hug? And we just hugged and embraced each other and he said, "This is my wife and this is my son." I'm like, "Oh, this is so amazing!" And then he just said to me, he said, "You remember that time in your office?" I'm like, "Oh man, I will never forget that time "in my office." He said, "That saved my life." And I asked him, I said, "Do you still have "that yellow notepad piece of paper?" He smiled really big, he reached back into his wallet, he opened it up, he pulled it out, and he said, "I've carried with me all the time, everywhere. "This completely saved my life." Then he handed it to me and he said, "I want you to have it." I'm like, "No, no, no, no, no, no this is yours." And he looked at me and he said, "Remember the prayer you prayed?" He said, "I no longer need to read it on paper "because those 100 reasons are now in my heart." And then we hugged some more and it was really sappy and I loved every minute of it. I hope that you'll embrace that you have no idea what God might do through a single word of encouragement. You have no idea how God could use you to offer someone hope, to build someone's faith. You have no idea what our God might do through a single word of encouragement. That's why the title of this message is "100 Reasons to Be Encouraged" because everyone you see is facing a battle that you know nothing about. And I don't know about you, but there is so much negativity in the world today. I can't open up my social media feed without being discouraged. I can't read a news app without just being depressed. I can't talk to people with all the heartbreaking news in the world without being disheartened and so many people in a polarized world can be so incredibly critical, so undeniably hateful. I think it's time that we as believers step in and lift others, bring words of hope, bring words of encouragement. I don't need any friends like Job had. You guys know about Job's friends? You know his story, those of you that may not be like Bible people, in the Old Testament? There's this guy named Job and he was really a good man, a godly man, and the enemy, Satan, attacked Job and robbed him of more than you could ever imagine. You know what his friends did? His friends got up into his business and they're like, "It's your fault! "You deserve it! "You're goin' through this because of your sin!" Negative, negative, negative, negative ! There's enough people like that in the world today. And I love how Job responded to them in Job 16:2, he said, "I've heard all this before!" And then he said, "What miserable comforters you are!" Any of ya have any friends like that? You just wanna say, "You're not the best comforter "when I'm down right now!" "What miserable comforters you are!" And then he says this, I would love to say this. I'm too pastoral to say this, but if you ever strip the pastoralness away from me, there are people I want to say this to you. "Won't you ever stop blowing hot air? "What makes you keep on talking?" Too honest? You ever feel like that at all? "Why do you keep blowin' hot air?" He says this, "I could say the same things "if you were in my place. "I could spout off criticism and shake my head at you." But I love what he says. He says, "But if it were me," Somebody say, "If it were me."

- [Congregation] If it were me.

- Elbow the person four seats down from you even though you're social distancing, "If it were me." He says, "If it were me, I would encourage you. "If it were me, I'd speak words of life. "I would try to take away your grief." "If it were me, I'd try to encourage you. If it's possible at all, I would love to be the greatest voice of encouragement in your life on

this side of heaven because the words we speak are filled with power. Our words can build up or our words can crush. In fact Scripture says in Proverbs 18:21 that "the tongue has the power of life and of death." I want my words to build your faith, to strengthen your confidence, to believe that God is for you, that He's with you, that He'll never leave you, He'll never forsake you, He's working in you. If it were up to me, I would encourage you and build your faith because everyone you see is facing a battle that you don't know anything about. Maybe that's why the author to the Hebrews said this in Hebrews 3:13. It's such a power-packed verse. The author said this, the author said, "Encourage one another," That he didn't say this, "every now and then." He didn't say, "Encourage one another "whenever the Spirit prompts you." What he said was, "Encourage one another," how often? He said, "Encourage one another daily." Now that's a lot of encouragement. Why do you encourage one another daily? You "encourage one another daily, as long as "it's called today, so that none of you may be hardened "by sin's deceitfulness." What does sin do? Sin lies. Sin distracts. Sin destroys. Sin tears down. Sin tells you what you don't have. Sin tells you you can never be happy. Sin tells you you won't measure up. I don't know about you all, but I face discouragement every single day. There's voices in my head that say, "You're not gonna measure up. "You're not gonna be good enough. "You can't get it all done." There's not a day that goes by that I don't experience discouragement and negative voices in my mind. Therefore because I need encouragement, I will freely give it. Because I need it, I assume you probably need it too, therefore we will "encourage one another "daily, daily, daily, as long as it is called today," so we're not distracted "by sin's deceitfulness." Now, when I talk about being encouraging, here's what I know some of you are gonna say immediately. You're gonna say, "Well, I'm just not naturally gifted "at it. "I'm not really good at encouraging others. "It's not a natural gift." And I would say to you, neither was walking when you were a little baby, right? You weren't very good at it at first, but somewhere along the way, you took a step and became a drunk Frankenstein, right? And you fell a couple of times and then you got back up and you learned how to walk. One of the most valuable tools you can learn, a gift to give to those around you, is to have the gift of encouragement. Learn how to do it. Make it a priority. You wanna learn how to do it? I give you the most simple rule that is a game-changer in the world of encouragement. The most simple rule is this. If you think something good, say it. If you think something good, express it. The moment you think anything positive about someone else, text them, call them. Those mobile devices, you still can make a call on them, I don't know if you know that or not? Reach out to someone, write a note. Tell them, express your love, your encouragement. The moment you think something good, say it, spray it, show it, express it! Why in the world would you ever rob someone from a blessing that goes unexpressed? One of the best things you can do for your relationships if you're married, if you have children, if you're a leader or an influencer at work, if you have someone in your small group is to bless them with words of encouragement. Set the blessing free. In fact, I have a rule in my own mind and evidently some people think this rule is unreasonable. But in my mind, I know every now and then I'm gonna say something that may not be helpful, I may be critical. My goal, honest to goodness, is to say 100 encouraging words for every word that may feel like criticism. I ran that idea by a few of my friends and they said, "Well that's impossible! "You don't know who I'm married to, "that would be unreasonable to ask!" Paul said this, he said, "Don't let any unwholesome talk "come out of your mouth, but only words helpful "for building others up." That's not 100 to one, that's 100 to none. Think about how different your relationships could be, the faith of the people around you, if every time you thought something good, you set it free to bless them? A hundred positive words of encouragement. Listen, I don't know about you, but with my children, I would

rather them hear 100 times what I see in them, what I believe in them, how I'm for them, where they're winning, instead of hearing me picking them apart for what they're doing wrong. I wanna instill spiritual confidence of how I see the work of God in them and not let any unwholesome talk come out of my mouth, but building others up. If it were up to me, I would be full of encouragement because everyone you see is fighting a battle that you know nothing about. This can change and revolutionize your marriage. Those of you that are not married yet or you hope to be one day, listen, if you build up your spouse, it's a complete game changer. I'm able to do what I'm able to do today because my wife believes in me and she'll tell me and she'll show me. One of the bigger complaints I hear from Christian women is, "My husband ain't no spiritual leader." What's funny is she'll say it right in front of him. Ha, ha, ha! You think that's gonna encourage him to be more full of faith? No! He's gonna take his ball and go home 'cause he feels like he can't win. What I would say is anytime and every time he does anything that is remotely spiritual, you celebrate it like crazy! All he has to do is say, "Hey, let's watch Church Online" and you just look at him and go, "Oh, I feel so close to you when you say that!" Just do it, do it! You'll be goin' to Church Online every single week. If he says a prayer and it's the only prayer he's ever prayed and it's a bad prayer, but he tried. He's prayin' over Thanksgiving meal, "God bless this food, amen." You just look at him and say, "I love it when you pray like that." Stick your tongue in his ear and tell him you're celebratin' a prayer, you're gonna have the most prayin' man of God you've ever seen in your life. You build them up. You guys are lookin' all nervous like, "Can we do that? "Is that legal?" You encourage what you want to see and you typically see more of it. If it were up to me, I would be so encouraging. If you think something good, say it. If you think something good, say it. In a world full of so much criticism, so much hatred, so much disappointment, so much negativity, as people of the light, we'll lift up others around us. I don't know about you, but since everyone is facing a battle that you know nothing of, that probably includes you. That would include me. Right now I'm facin' some pretty real discouragement to the point that in the back of my mind, it just like almost won't let go. I've found that sometimes the person that needs the most encouragement is often me. And you might find the person that needs the most encouragement at times would be you because so often people may look at you and think, "Man, you got it all together." And you are smiling on the outside, but you're often hurting on the inside. You may be like a lot of people who look really, really confident, but the truth is there's parts of you that are indescribably insecure. When others look at you, you look like you got it all together, but they have no idea privately, at home, you feel like you're falling completely apart. Sometimes the person that really needs to be encouraged is you. I wanna show you the portion of Scripture that really speaks to me and builds my faith and equips me to do just that. It's found in the Old Testament in 1 Samuel 30 and to give you the context, David, if you remember David was a valiant warrior and king of Israel, his army arrived to their home in Ziklag and the enemies had burned their entire city to the ground, it was left in ruins. And if, imagine this, you come back with your troops, your men, and your wives and your children have been kidnapped, taken away, and your homes burned to the ground. So here's the picture, the city's burned, the families are gone, and what do the men do? The men blamed David. All of the sudden, they're all crying, they're all wailing, and the men decided, "It's David's fault. "We're gonna make him pay and we're gonna put him to death." That's exactly what we see potentially happening in 1 Samuel 30:6. "David was now in great danger because all his men "were very bitter about losing their sons and daughters, "and they began to talk of stoning him." But what did David do? Scripture says, "But David found strength "in the Lord his God." "David found strength in the Lord his God." This phrase "found strength" comes from a Hebrew word "chazaq." Everybody say "chazaq" just for fun.

- [Congregation] Chazaq.

- It's spelled C-H-A-Z-A-Q, chazaq, and it means to tell yourself to be strong. This Hebrew word implies that you're talking to yourself. In fact, that's probably why the King James Version translated it this way. "But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." He encouraged himself, he spoke to himself. He told himself of the faithfulness of God. He preached to himself about the goodness of God. He reminded himself of the provision of God. He built himself up in the things of God. When everything he saw with his eyes said, "Hopeless," when everything around him cried, "Discouragement," he encouraged himself, he preached to himself, he built himself up in things of faith. He encouraged himself in the things of the Lord. He got his chazaq back. Oh, I can say that again! Okay, some of you need to get your chazaq back, you've gotta encourage yourself in the Lord. What happened after this and verse eight says this, "Then David asked the Lord, 'Should I chase after 'this band of raiders?' 'Will I catch them?' "And the Lord said to him, 'Yes, go after them. 'You will surely recover everything 'that was taken from you!'" When did this word of victory come? After David encouraged himself in the things of God. What do we know? We know that positive words are so difficult to remember and the negative words are so difficult to forget. Are you like this? I could have 10 people give me a compliment, say something, "Oh, we're so thankful. "Oh, you've changed our life." One person gets up into my business with criticism and that one thing seems to take over. In fact, neurologists will tell you that about your brain, that your brain is almost pre-disposed to believe the negative immediately, but it takes a full 15 seconds of focusing on anything positive before you even start to believe it. It's so difficult to remember something positive, but it's so difficult to forget something that's negative. That's why what we say to ourself matters more than you can imagine. Your self-talk, are they words of life and words of faith or words of death and words of hopelessness? David encouraged himself, he talked to himself, he preached to himself, he built himself up in the Lord. In fact to me, it's so profoundly personal when you just even read through the Psalms and you read the words of David. It's like reading his own private journal. It's like getting a glimpse into his own inner dialogue. Three different times, David talked to himself and said the same exact thing. Three different places in Scripture David asked himself, "Why are you so downcast, oh my soul? "Why are you hurting? "Why are you so low? "Why are you so down? "Why are you so depressed?" Somebody here, you may wanna ask yourself that. Why do you feel so disconnected? Why are you so battling with anxiety? Why has fear overwhelmed you when you know you're called to be a person of faith? And David preaches to himself, "Why so downcast, oh my soul?" And then he encourages himself and says, "Put your hope in the Lord." Why are you depressed, why are you down when you know the faithfulness, the goodness, the power, and the provision of God? Put your hope in God. Put your faith in God. Put your trust in God. He's always with you. He will never leave you. He is completely for you. "Why so downcast, oh my soul? "Put your hope in God." What David didn't say is he didn't say this, he didn't say, "You got this David." He didn't say, "You have what it takes on your own, David." No, he said, "Put your hope in God." Get your chazaq back. Talk to yourself. Preach to yourself. Whenever you look on the news and says, "Everything's coming to the end. "This is the worst thing ever. "We're never gonna recover ." Go preach to yourself, "My God is my Provider. "My God is my Protector. "My God is good, He's all-powerful, He's ever present." He knew this before it ever happened and He's working in all things to bring about good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. When that voice says, "You're screwed. "Your relationships are gonna break down. "You're never gonna have anything

meaningful." "No, my God is working in me and I trust God "is working in the people around me." Whenever you find yourself down, depressed, discouraged, and afraid, just like my friend Scott, write down 100 words to be encouraged, 100 reasons to keep your faith, to tell yourself, "No weapon formed against me will ever prosper. "I am the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. "I am blessed coming in and I am blessed going out. "My sins have been forgiven, I am redeemed. "I am a child of the Living God. "I am a joint heir with Jesus Christ. "I am an ambassador of the Most High God. "I am the highest ranking diplomat sent by God from heaven "to represent the love of Jesus on this earth."

- [Congregation] Amen!

- "I am free from the power "of sin and of death. "I have the mind of Christ. "I am filled with the very Spirit that raised Christ "from the dead. "I am the workmanship of God created in Christ Jesus "to do good works which He prepared "in advance for me to do. "My sins "are completely forgiven. "I am a new creation in Christ. "My sinfulness has been separated from me "as far as the East is from the West. "I'm called by God to be a light in this dark world. "I am the salt of this earth. "I am more than a conqueror in Christ Jesus. "I'm the head, I'm not the tail. "I'm seated in heavenly places with my Savior Jesus. "My God has not given me a spirit of fear, "but of power and of love and of a sound mind. "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." "Why so downcast, oh my soul?" Why are people of faith walkin' around actin' like we got no power? Get your chazaq back! Preach to yourself. And because of what God did for us and because of who He is in us, as far as is concerned to us, we'll be a voice of encouragement. We'll be a voice of faith. When the world seems polarized, we'll express love, we'll express grace. We'll stand for what's right, we'll stand for justice, we'll be people of faith, and they will know us by our love. If it were up to me, I'd be the biggest voice of encouragement you've ever seen this side of heaven. So whatever you're goin' through, and I would guess for some of you it might be a heck of a lot, and I don't want little power statements to be insulting to you, I want the true power and presence of God to be enough for you. Be encouraged. Our God loves you more than you could ever imagine. Our God understands your pain. His Word is true. He's always faithful. His promises are for you. So when you're down, talk to yourself words of faith, words of life. And hey, with the people around you, every time you think something good, you say it, you bless them. As far as I'm concerned, I'm gonna encourage those around me. So Father, we ask today that by the power of Your Word, you would encourage your church. God, I can only imagine in all the different parts of the world, all the different scenarios in all the different levels of pain and complications people have experienced this week. We ask, God, that Your Word, Your power, Your presence would be the lifters of our head. As you're praying and reflecting today, I wanna just talk to you wherever you are. Those of you who would say, "Yes, I wanna be an encouraging voice to those around me, "all the time, everywhere. "I wanna be a voice of hope and life "and faith of encouragement." Would you life your hands right now? Just lift them up. You can just type in the chat, "That's me, I'm in." Just type it in, "I wanna encourage." So Father, today we thank You that You're a God who encourages us. And Lord we know that our words have so much power. God, help us to not let any unwholesome talk, any words of death, come out of our mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up, for lifting them, for pointing them to You, for giving life. God, may we bless others with the gift of encouragement. Give us opportunities and, God, every time we think it, help us to show it, to say it, to express it. As you keep praying today, maybe you're watchin' online, you might be watchin' on your phone, or you're watching at home on TV, watching later on

on a YouTube clip, or you're at a physical campus even now at this moment and there are some of you that you really need encouragement. You might not know where you stand with God, you might find yourself overwhelmed with fear. Let me just encourage you with some really, really good news. If you ever feel guilty because of your sin, I understand. The truth is all of us, we've all sinned, we've all messed up. And so we wonder, "Where do we stand with God "and if we've done so many things wrong?" Be encouraged that our God loves you, He still loves you. And our God is so good and so full of grace that He sent His Son Jesus who was perfect and never sinned. And Jesus loved you so much that while we were still sinning, He gave His life on a cross. And because of the power of God, when Jesus paid the price for our sins, our God raised Him from the dead, He defeated death, hell, victory, and the grave. Be encouraged that anyone, and this includes you, doesn't matter what you've done, doesn't matter how dark your life feels, anyone who calls on that name that is above every name, the name of Jesus, when you cry out to Jesus, God hears your prayers, He forgives your sins, and you become brand new. Be encouraged. Perhaps you're watching today because this is God's message to you. He loves you. He wants you. He wants you to be forgiven. He wants you to experience life. He wants you to know His grace. He wants you to be free. And all of our churches are watching online, those who say, "Yes, I want His forgiveness, "I need His grace." When you call out on Jesus, He'll forgive your sins, you become brand new. Wherever you're watching today, those who say, "I want His forgiveness. "I surrender my life, I give it to Him. "Jesus, I give You my life," that's your prayer, just lift your hands now, right now, lift them up. Type in the chat, "I need You." Those in all of our different churches calling on Him, we celebrate you, we thank God for you. Type it in the chat, "I need the grace of Jesus." And I would love it if you would all pray with those around you. Pray, "Heavenly Father, forgive my sins. "Jesus save me. "Make me new. "Fill me with Your Spirit so I can walk with You, "so I could know You, be changed by You, "be a voice of hope and encouragement "to point people to Jesus. "Thank you for your grace. "Thank you for salvation. "Thank you for new life, I give you mine. "In Jesus name I pray." Could somebody celebrate the grace of God today at all of our churches online? Welcome those born into God's family!