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# **Where Seldom Is Heard a Discouraging Word**

**# 931-A**

**Series: Living Lessons From Proverbs**



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# Where Seldom Is Heard a Discouraging Word

There you are, seated at your desk, trying to decide which of the stack of unpaid bills that are perched precariously before you will get the dubious distinction of being paid with the last ounce of your hard-earned funds, when the intercom interrupts you. Racing through your mind are the day's events so far. It's hard to imagine which of those exciting activities best describes the mood of your day.

Could it be the rusty radiator caper? You remember when the car boiled over on the freeway on the way to work at 8:15 in the rush hour traffic? Or would you bank on the tow-truck trauma, when the bearded, husky wrecker driver backed up to your already anemic-looking vehicle and didn't stop in time, placing a neat "v" in your otherwise common-place grill? Or was it his gruff "Sorry, pal, I think it was that way before," that sort of set the tone for the day?

Maybe it was the burned-out breakfast bargain that took the cake. Or was it that call from the bank to tell you that you were overdrawn, while the president of your company was sitting and listening as you arrogantly used your speaker phone to receive the call. Or the highlight of your day could have occurred a few minutes later when your wife called to tell you about the new style change that has demonstrably affected your wardrobe since the cleaner ruined both of your suits. Or, of course, it could have been later in the morning when you picked up the phone, thinking it was the guy in the next office who always plays tricks on you, and you answered, "Hi, vacuum brain," only to realize it was your mother-in-law on the other end of the line.

Lunch was a winner, too. You took your prized client to the best place in town, only to find (halfway through the meal) that you had left your billfold at the office and your brains somewhere on the freeway. Quite a day, wouldn't you say? So there you are in shock, when over the intercom you hear "Eddie is here to see you." You literally jump from your chair and race to open the

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door. “Boy, am I glad to see you,” you exuberantly greet your welcome friend... “am I glad to see you”. Of course, had it been any one of a thousand other people, you would have wanted to hide under that hole in the carpet you just caused when you spilled the jug of super glue. But you are glad to see Eddie. Why? Because Eddie is one of life’s encouragers.

You know who life’s encouragers are. They are the guys and the gals who always have a smile on their faces, always have a word to cheer you up, always seem to be looking at life from the positive perspective. The sun always seems to be shining in their world.

On the other hand, we all know some of life’s *discouragers*, too. These are the guys and the gals who look at the half-full glass and always see it half empty; who see life’s trials as tragedies, life’s tests as pests, and who view most of life’s experiences as though they were the active participants in a horror movie.

You want to hide when you see them coming. Like Job’s friends, they prefer to infer that life’s lightning bolts are flying in your direction because of unconfessed sin. With pious condescension, they quote Scripture as though it was their personal weapon to bring you to conviction, and they often leave your world as quickly as they found it, leaving you speechless and hopeless in the process.

But the Eddie Encouragers in your world come into your life like rays of sunshine. They understand how you feel, but they haven’t come to judge you. They have come to encourage you. They have come to draw you to Christ by encouraging you that the living God has a plan for your life; and nothing, not even rusty radiators, traumatic tow trucks, or forgotten billfolds can ever overpower His divine sovereignty. In fact, those very traumas, Eddie Encourager reminds you, are simply God’s windows through which He can whisper one more time, “I Love You”.

Which kind of man or woman are you? When you enter the room, does a cloud hover overhead or is your smile so contagious the devil wants you quarantined? Chances are, you are one or the other. And chances are, God has a distinctive plan for you to become one of life’s encouragers.

That’s what this lesson is all about. As our parade through Proverbs passes the reviewing stand and we wind our way to the

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finish line of this, our final face of wisdom, Learning to Give Your Life Away, we must ask that penetrating question of ourselves: Are we encouragers? Do we radiate God's perspective of life to those about us? If we are to become men and women of wisdom, we must become encouragers. We must become transmitters of joy, reflectors of light, and broadcasters of hope.

The lesson title actually comes from an old traditional song that has become a part of the American way of life. It is entitled "Home On the Range". The lyrics go something like this:

*"Home, home on the Range,  
Where the deer and the antelope play  
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word  
And the skies are not cloudy all day."*

We might rewrite that witty ditty this way in today's evangelical circles.

*Oh find me a church, oh how long I have searched  
I have traveled so many a mile  
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word  
And the face people wear is a smile.*

*Home, home that will be,  
Where the dearest dear Christians hold fast  
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word  
And God's people are friendly at last.*

The book of Proverbs, as well as the rest of Scripture, has a lot to say about the ministry of encouragement. So often I hear from Christians' statements like, "If only God would give me a ministry". I'm here to tell you that YOU HAVE ONE. And it's one you don't have to wait to begin. It is the ministry of encouragement.

This next to the final lesson in our proverbial journey will center upon what Proverbs has to say about the Christian and the positive perspective. By the positive perspective, I mean the incredible God-given ability to view all of life's experiences, even our tragedies and our mistakes, as useful in the light of the basic purpose of God, which is to transform us into His likeness.

Paul was a man with the positive perspective. His life didn't turn out the way he had planned, but only because his God had a better plan. Noah was a man with the positive perspective, even though his was an unbelievable task to prepare him for

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an unthinkable tragedy. Joseph was a man with a positive perspective though nearly all of life's "unfair" traumas fell on him while he was still a youth; and though Satan meant them all for evil, God meant them all for good. Joseph understood. Because he did, he could be kind, even to his enemies, for he knew who the real enemy was... He could be an encourager when there seemed to be nothing encouraging around. So Joseph developed a ministry, an incredible ministry, because he viewed all of life from the positive perspective.

Jesus, of course, is our most powerful illustration of the positive perspective. In His life on earth, virtually nothing went right (from man's point of view). He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He came to His own and His own received Him not. Yet because He had the Father's vision of the Father's purposes, Jesus became the world's most incredible encourager.

Would you like to become an encourager? Would you like to begin to see life from the positive perspective of eternity and communicate that perspective to a world that is drowning in a sea of negatives and hopelessness? My friend, as the veteran newscaster used to say so faithfully, "There's good news tonight."

I want us to speak to three aspects of the ministry of encouragement. The first is the medicine of kindness. Kindness we might define as "that basic quality of life that struggles not to offend." Kindness issues forth from the sensitive kind of spirit we discussed in our last study, and it expresses itself with a considerate kind of gentleness that defies understanding. It is patient when others are angry; it is meek when others are proud; it is compassionate when others are indifferent. Kindness is a basic way of life that encompasses the whole of one's personality. It does not take offense needlessly, but rather comes to the defense of those who are hurting. Let's call it the "medicine of kindness", because Proverbs seems to indicate that the very spirit of kindness has some unbelievable healing characteristics.

Proverbs 11:17 tells us, first of all, that the medicine of kindness heals the spirit of the person himself. Listen to several translations as they speak to this passage. Here's one:

The merciful man (*of loving-kindness*) dealeth good to his own soul... (Proverbs 11:17a)

A kind man benefits himself... (NIV)

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A merciful (*kindly*) man does himself good... (NAS)

Your own soul is nourished when you are kind, it is destroyed when you are not... (TLB)

What that verse says is that your physical, emotional, and mental health will all suffer if you do not appropriate the God-transmitted quality of kindness. If you don't believe it, talk to doctors and dentists, and ask them if there are not profound medical effects which stem from anger, hostility, bitterness, vengefulness, and vindictiveness. Then ask them what happens when that person, through some supernatural change in their spirit, becomes kind, gentle, forgiving, understanding, and peaceful. Kindness is a medicine. It helps to heal the body. It helps to heal the spirit. It helps to heal the soul.

Secondly, kindness is a medicine that Christians are to dispense to the rest of the world as well.

Kindly words are like a honeycomb, both sweet and healthful. (Proverbs 16:24 paraphrase)

You can walk into a room and speak words of kindness, and like a healing miracle, spirits begin to be encouraged, smiles form on the faces of those about you, and there goes into motion a perhaps mysterious and yet profoundly successful cure known as the cure of kindness. Kindness heals marriages. It heals strife-torn families, and it heals personal wounds that are so deep that healing seems to be an impossible task.

But simply the act of rejecting every unkind word, of refusing to respond in kind to every unkind act, of defying the hurt of every unkind accusation and rather responding with kindness no matter the charge, will, like the soothing taste of honey, satisfy a need in man that only God-given kindness can satisfy.

Thirdly, kindness changes the way you look. Proverbs 19:22 declares

The charm of a man is his loving-kindness. (Proverbs 19:22 paraphrase)

Kindness makes a man attractive. (TLB)

And the older you get, the more visible becomes either the hardness of your spirit or the kindness in your heart. The very lines that form on your face will reveal the degree of kindness in your life. Kind people don't have to say a word. Their very faces light up with the light of kindness and say to the world... "Jesus

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Christ who is perfect loving-kindness lives in my life.”

Fourthly, kindness produces respect.

He who follows after justice and kindness will find life,  
prosperity, and honor. (Proverbs 21:21 paraphrase)

And fifthly, kindness changes the way you respond to your enemies. By your enemies, I mean those who do not do what is always in your best interest, those who may be using you, abusing you, maligning you, misunderstanding you, even attempting to destroy you. God’s spirit in you does not retaliate. He responds with loving-kindness. The world does not understand that. Many Christians don’t either. And even understanding it is obviously not the same thing as practicing it.

We looked at these principles in the New Testament. Let’s just scan them quickly to understand the miracle of the unity of Scripture. In Proverbs you see the bridge that takes the illustrations of Israel and ties them to the applications of the Gospels. They dispensed the “love your enemies” message long before the Sermon on the Mount did. Listen:

Do not rejoice when your enemy meets trouble. Let there be  
no gladness when he falls-

for the Lord may become displeased with you and stop  
punishing them. (Proverbs 24:17 TLB)

In other words, God is just as interested in your kindness towards your enemies as he is in their discipline. In fact, the absence of kindness on your part may actually hinder His work in their lives.

If your enemy is hungry, (what should you do?) give him  
food; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

(Proverbs 25:21 TLB)

In doing this, you heap coals of fire on his head.

(Proverbs 25:22 NIV)

The godly pray for those who long to kill them.

(Proverbs 29:10 TLB)

Do what? *Pray* for them. We see shades of Matthew 5:44. So the supernatural instruction to pray for your enemies, to feed them when they are hungry, to bless them rather than to curse them was woven into the fabric of Proverbs as a principle of kindness common to the character of God generations before Jesus came to earth.

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Remember, it is not a national principle. Jehovah never applied it (at least not that I can remember) in his dealings with Israel's enemies, and it is not a national principle today. Yet, so many well-meaning, but perhaps misinformed people are using the Christian banner as a white flag of surrender, surrendering to the nations who defy the reality of God, deny the deity of Christ, and vow to replace the church with a godless state. These nations are God's enemies, and thus they are ours. We do not lay down our arms and surrender to them. This is not a national principle, any more than "Thou shalt not kill" is a national principle. When the powers that be that are ordained of God call upon those under their authority to take up arms against their enemies, they have a God-given responsibility to fight. Israel did, and so do we.

But it *is* a personal principle. With God as your protector and demonstrating the Kingdom as your primary goal, God's man or woman displays kindness even to, no, make that especially to, his enemies. It will heal us. It will heal them, and it will demonstrate to a world of lost people just how the Gospel of the Son of God really works.

So if you'd like to be a doctor, but you don't have a degree, here's a safe way for you to do it. You can heal many of life's wounds by dispensing, according to the Master Physician's precise prescriptions, the medicine of kindness.

Before we pass on to part two of this study, let me just remind you of what kindness is and what kindness does. Kindness does not hold grudges. It has an incredibly short memory where offenses are involved. Kindness does not retaliate. Vengeance is God's. He will repay, saith the Lord, and kindness understands that. Kindness is not tense, angry, volatile, or hostile. Kindness is calm, patient, relaxed, and forgiving. Most important of all, kindness is a characteristic of the nature of God, and therefore is a characteristic of the New Nature, God in man. That's why Paul commanded us to put away once and for all, anger, malice, wrath, evil speaking, and the like and instead become kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven us.

Now I know what you're thinking. You're thinking that through this last segment of Proverbs, I've gone soft on sin and am propagating a liberal gospel of goodness, kindness, charity,



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and love. Not so. You and I are called upon to preach the whole counsel of God. Satan's design is that we move to extremes and polarize our Christianity. So he has trapped some in the vice of social action and kindness to the exclusion of the Cross. They are so busy being good, they forget that goodness is only the product of the regenerated man, and only the result of being born again by the power of the Holy Spirit as a result of Jesus Christ's death on the Cross for our sins.

On the other hand, there are those who are so busy preaching on the power, the problems and the progression of sin that they become totally oblivious to the life and the love the reborn man or woman is to live and to give. Satan loves either extreme. We must forever keep the balance. You cannot be kind in the Scriptural sense, if you have not been born again. You cannot imitate God's kindness. It is a part of His character, and the natural man cannot receive it or even understand it. To become kind you must be born again. Jesus Christ must come into your life upon your confession of sin and your acceptance of His atoning death on the cross as you invite Him to be your Lord and your King. If you have never invited Christ to be Savior and Lord of your life, don't even try to be kind. You don't have the power to do so.

But you and I, if we have been born again, are to be becoming so decidedly supernatural in our behavior and in our demeanor that the lost and dying world who has not yet met the King will be in awe as they see the Kingdom demonstrated in us. One way that is done is by the kindness you and I show to a world that does not even fully understand the word. So take large doses of the medicine of kindness and dispense it freely.

Secondly, as an act of kindness, learn to be an encourager. An encourager is one who assists others in viewing life from God's perspective. The encourager sees the Son shining behind every cloud and is able to articulate that in a way that builds up and builds hope. Proverbs calls on us to become encouragers. Listen.

Anxious hearts are very heavy but a word of encouragement  
does wonders. (Proverbs 12:25 TLB)

Isn't that the truth? Haven't you ever felt so low, you thought you were below sea level, and some Eddie Encourager comes along. With one kind, encouraging word he lifts your spirits so that you soar like an eagle. Proverbs goes on:

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Pleasant sights and good reports give happiness and health. (Proverbs 15:30 TLB)

There's our pharmacy open for business again. An encouraging word and the fever of frustration drops below normal.

A cheerful heart does good like medicine, (Proverbs 17:22 TLB)

And there's no prescription needed.

Friendly suggestions are as pleasant as perfume. (Proverbs 27:9 TLB)

It's medicine with a sweet-smelling fragrance.

Proverbs even indicates that an encouraging spirit affects the way you look.

A happy face means a glad heart; (Proverbs 15:13 TLB)

When a man is gloomy, everything seems to go wrong; (Proverbs 15:15 TLB)

In other words, the way you see life shows on your face, and the face you wear in turn affects how you see life. Come on, let's all smile. (Did it hurt?)

Proverbs adds that nothing encourages another like the wisdom of God's man or woman.

The advice of a wise man refreshes like water from a mountain stream. (Proverbs 13:14 TLB)

It is crystal clear, quiet, nourishing, peaceful, helpful.

The ministry of encouragement is a ministry YOU can perform. There's no real waiting time before you are mature enough or equipped enough to begin.

Throughout Scripture, God's man or woman is exhorted to learn to be an encourager. Here are some passages you can meditate on in the next few days, if you want to develop the ministry of encouragement.

- Would you like to encourage those who minister to you? Or those you disciple?
  - Look at Deuteronomy 1:38 and 3:28.
- Would you like to read about how to encourage yourself?
  - Take a look at I Samuel 30:6.
- Would you like to know how you can encourage those in the ministry who need support?
  - Read II Chronicles 31:4.

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- Would you like to encourage men and women to return to a state of obedience?  
— Read II Chronicles 35:2.
- Would you like to see God's prescription for harmony on the job or harmony in the ministry?  
— Read Isaiah 41:5-7.

God's man or woman is being called upon to dispense the medicine of kindness by developing the ministry of encouragement. In other words, God is calling you to become an encourager. You say, "I just don't have an encouraging word. I just don't know what to say when I'm faced with those who are down and out or down and dying."

May I close this study by reminding you that our Gospel is a series of encouraging words. So I would like to leave this subject by leaving you with six of the most encouraging words ever written to man. Memorize them and you will always have something encouraging to say in every situation.

Word number one is **SALVATION**.

Many of us have to a large degree forgotten why we are here. We are here to proclaim the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture, that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. My friend, that's good news. No man or woman today need ever face the penalty of sin for eternity. Jesus settled the sin question once and for all. All you must do is be willing to receive the free gift He purchased for you and be born again. It's foolishness to the unbeliever; but to those who are being saved, it is the power of God unto salvation.

Wherever you live, wherever you work, whatever your world is like, you are surrounded by people who are dying and discouraged because they have not experienced the power of God through Jesus Christ. Would you like to become an encourager? Then tell them there's hope. Tell them there's joy. Tell them there's peace. Tell them there's Jesus. Invite them to invite Him to become their Savior. That's why it's called the "Gospel" It's *GOOD NEWS*. Tell it like it is.

The second encouraging word is **COMFORT**

Jesus said it was expedient for Him to go because He had another comforter, even the Holy Spirit, He was sending in His

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name. With this Spirit coming to live in us, He could joyfully announce that He would never leave us or forsake us, that no one could pluck us out of His Father's hand, that nothing could separate us from the love of God—not tribulation, nor distress, nor nakedness, nor famine, nor peril, nor the sword.

You cannot often change the circumstances of the lives of those you are trying to encourage. Indeed, those circumstances may be God's very tools to bring them to Himself. The key is not to change their circumstances, but rather to change their perspective. They need to know they don't have to walk alone. They don't have to face life in their own energy. They really do have a friend who sticks closer than a brother, a friend who demonstrated the greatest act of love known to mankind, a friend who died for them, a friend who lives to make intercession for them.

Beloved, that's good news. That's encouraging. Tell it.

The third encouraging word is **COMPLETION**.

Our God is going to finish what He started. Like Jonah, that person you are trying to encourage may have short-circuited God's power in his life and fled from the will of God and wasted years; but He who has begun a good work in them will perform it. It's not too late. It's never too late to be transformed and empowered. You can't buy back the wasted years, but you can maximize the months or the minutes that remain. God hasn't written you off. He started something in your life when you trusted Christ. He plans to finish it. You say, but I'm not faithful. I know. But faithful is He who hath called you, He will also do it. God plans to finish what He started. That, my friend, is an encouraging word.

The fourth encouraging word is **SOVEREIGNTY**.

It says very simply this: "ALL things work together for good to them who love God, who are the called ones according to His purpose." Not some things, but all things: your tragedies, your parents, your enemies, your mistakes, your successes, your failures, your frustrations, *ALL* things. God is a Master planner. He has a Master plan. He uses even the threads that seem to be of useless color to highlight the pattern of His Grace. So your past does not disqualify you from being used. In many ways, it even equips you to be used. God is not wasteful. Even out of ashes, He fashions pure gold by mixing in generous portions of

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His mercy. Beloved, that's good news. You may not be able to help someone undo his past, but you can encourage them to forget their past, even praise God for using their past to fashion their future. Sovereignty is a word of encouragement indeed.

The fifth word of encouragement is **RETURN**.

Beloved, listen, Jesus Christ IS coming again. I do not know how many Christians actually get excited today about His coming. He's coming FOR us, and eventually He's coming WITH us to set up His Kingdom. But first, He is coming FOR US...and oh, what a day that will be...

For the Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, and with the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first,

Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the LORD. (I Thessalonians 4:16,17)

Doesn't your heart beat faster when you hear that? That's good news!! Any weary, lonely, discouraged heart ought to throw off the shackles that bind it to despair and shout it to the rooftops, He's coming. He's coming. He's coming. Wherefore, Paul said, comfort and encourage one another with these words. We don't talk enough about His coming today. You want to encourage those who are down and despondent? Tell them the truth. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, He's coming. We do not know the day or the hour, but we can know the season, and the season is upon us. Jesus is Coming! HE WILL RETURN. What an encouraging word.

The sixth word of encouragement is **HEAVEN**.

Not only is God finishing what He started and using all things to His glory, not only is He coming for us, He's coming to take us to a place and to a life that will restore creation to its original intended purpose. There will be no more sorrow. There will be no more tears. There will be no more crying. There will be no more loneliness. There will be no more sin. There will be no more suffering. There will be no more guilt. There will be no more rejection. There will be no more discouragement. The former things are passed away.

Heaven is not some figment of a theological imagination. Heaven is a real, distinct, specific, deliberate promise from God. He has told us what it's like, what it offers, how to get there,

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what to expect, what not to expect, and why it's worth waiting for. If heaven's not real to you, it's no wonder you're discouraged. If heaven IS real to you, then you've got an encouraging word to share with every suffering, sorrowing, sulking, or searching saint you meet.

The difference is perspective. Satan has deceived many of us until we have accepted the world's perspective of life, and even as Christians, we face those about us in trouble with the world's answers to the world's problems. No wonder they're discouraged. We either try to promise them easy answers that God hasn't designed for their good, or we shrug our shoulders in a hopelessly phlegmatic expression of faith and say nothing, as though our God had just met His Waterloo. God may not give them that job. God may not save that person's life. God may not make them prosperous. God may not heal them of that crippling disease. He may; He may not.

Those are not your encouraging words. They are the world's encouraging words. God's encouraging words lift us out of the physical circumstances that bind us until we see them as spiritual blessings as we await our eventual transformation and deliverance.

Because we are spiritual saints who are living for a spiritual kingdom, our encouraging words are salvation, comfort, completion, sovereignty, return, and heaven. They are spiritual promises for real live Christians who live in a very discouraging physical world...a world that is filled with sickness, disease, distress, and death.

Today you can go home and begin to be an encourager. You can begin to view life from God's perspective.

You can begin to walk alongside the suffering, the lonely, the dying, and the discouraged and begin to give them REAL words of encouragement.

If they are **lost**,

— you can give them the word of **salvation**.

If they are **lonely**,

— you can give them the word of **comfort**.

If they are **discouraged**,

— you can give them the word of **completion**.

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If they are ***in distress*** over the past,  
— you can give them the word of ***sovereignty***

If they are ***hopeless***,  
— you can give them the word of ***return***.

If they are ***tired and weary***,  
— you can give them the word of ***Heaven***.

If you are a Christian, you can shout it to the housetops. There's good news tonight. There's an encouraging word for every situation that will cross your path in the days to come. And remember, the God who has written to you declaring this Good News has also commissioned you to proclaim it. You see, the church can preach repentance from sin and deliverance from sin, and still preach an encouraging Gospel. After all, what could be more encouraging than the Cross?

When you and I walk out into the world, we will once again face all of the crushing problems of life that have brought us to despair in the past, and we will be confronted within minutes with people who are, as a result of those same kinds of problems, dying from the disease of discouragement.

But you and I have a new song to sing. We have a new job to do. We have a very real assignment in the marketplace of life. We and we alone, as Christians, have the words of encouragement. Dare we let a minute go by without sharing them? Ought not our song to be something like this?

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WHERE SELDOM IS HEARD A DISCOURAGING WORD

Lord, save us right now; wipe that frown from our brow  
Take away all those groans and those tears.  
May there never be heard a discouraging word  
May we rather allay all those fears.

There's a home...a home that is theirs  
Where the Master awaits them in love.  
And ne'er will be heard a discouraging word  
In that home that awaits us above.

Oh, how often at night, when the heavens are bright  
Do our spirits yet long as we pray.  
When the trumpet shall sound, and the angels resound  
And the Son shall return on that day.

Home, Home we will be...  
And what Joy and what Peace that will bring.  
So there need not be heard one discouraging word  
From one who belongs to the KING.

So encourage each other; encourage each brother  
With this powerful, scriptural warning,  
The weeping endures but a moment beloved,  
There's joy—oh there's joy... in the morning.

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